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MILDMAY PARK

*Episodes of a Doughboy in
a London Hospital*

BY
MY SERGEANT

"With all thy faults, I love thee still"

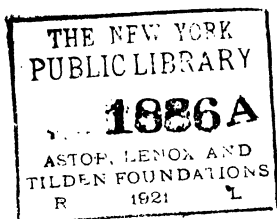


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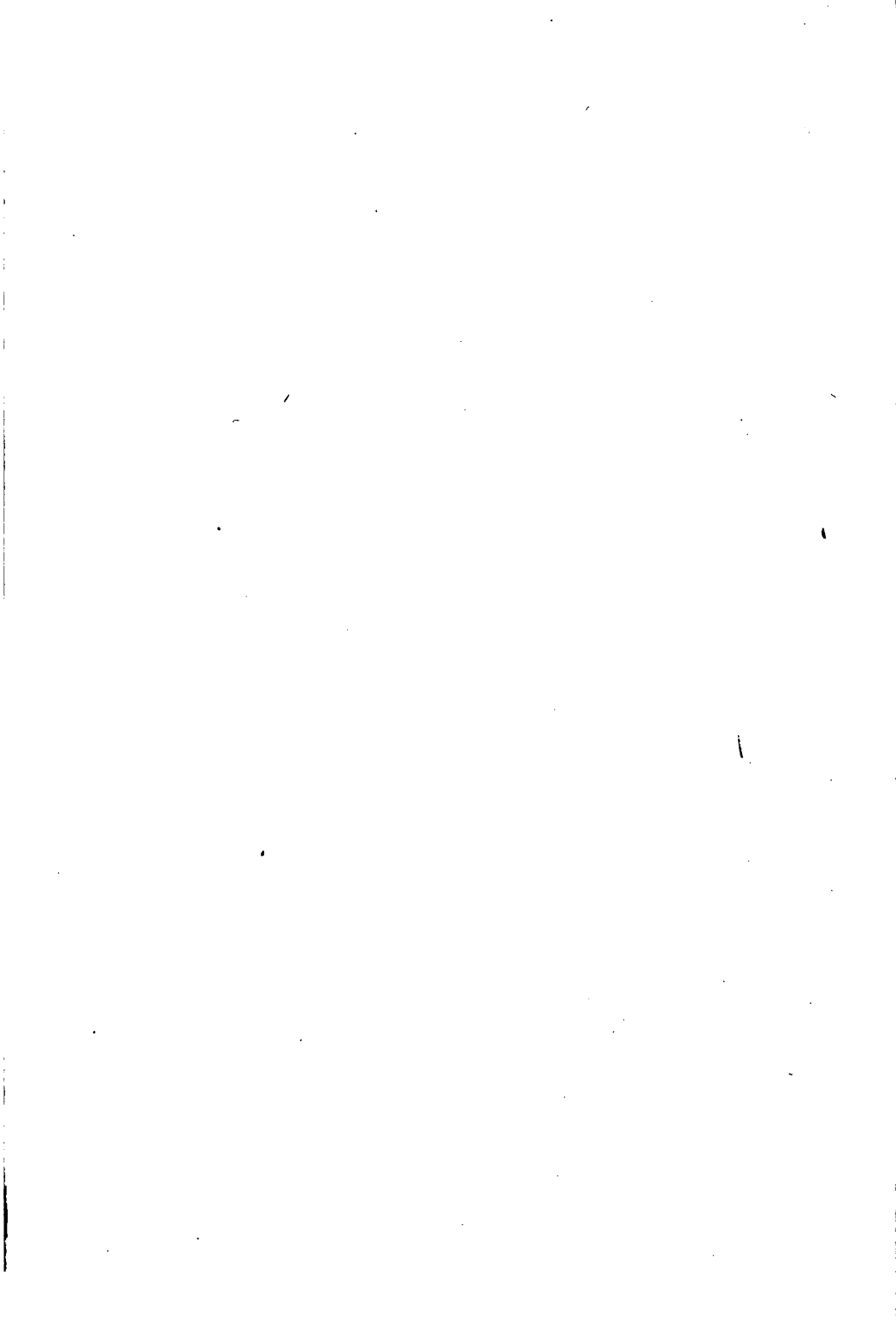
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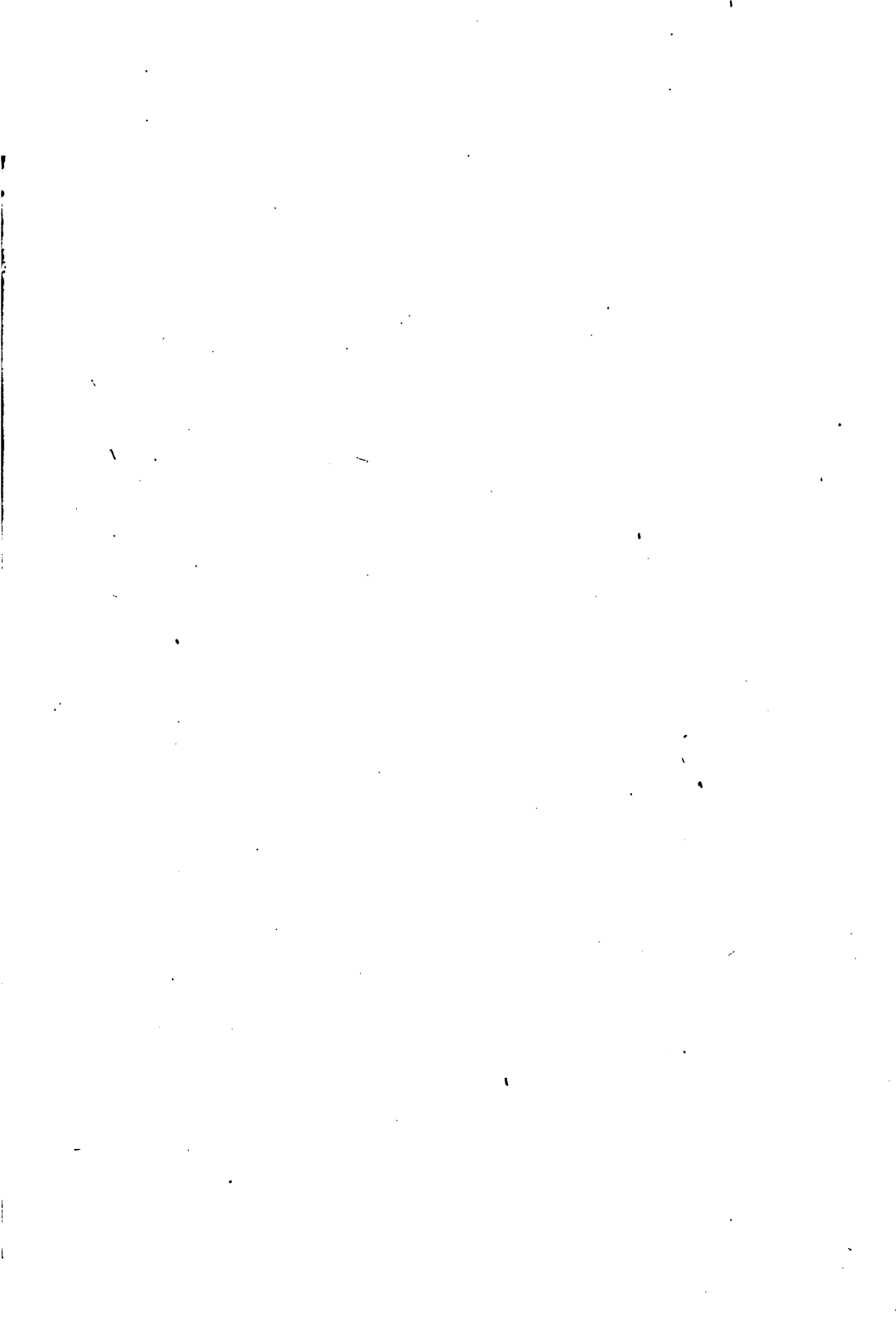
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MILDMAY PARK



MILDMAY PARK

I

MILDMAY PARK

IT was springtime in Mildmay Park; Springtime in London! The season when all the world breathes of romance and fond hearts beat in fond rhapsody beneath a starlit heaven, as they lie close together on a moon-flooded lawn!

Mildmay Park, as you all know, is one of the prettiest spots of all the pretty spots London has created for young love's mad dreams. It is not such a very big park and it lies in the embrace of myriads of red-brick, bay-windowed houses peculiar to suburban London. Crowded busses careen madly on its all four sides, and cynical, but envious belated spring-time individuals, whose youth has been nipped by over-zealous moralists like some peach-orchard nipped by frost as its pink petals were about to unfold to dazzle the eyes with their voluptuous beauty, gaze down in disapproval upon the countless budding

young things who sprawl on the grass at risk of rubbing off some of their velvety youth, or who loll in unconventional attitudes on the long rows of benches. Later in the day, these same critical individuals may be seen sauntering along the walls of Mildmay with eagle eye of disapproval resting upon these unfortunate happy ones who look up at them and laugh rudely in their jealous, zealous faces.

It is a park made for love. It occupies about twenty city squares, perhaps, but has the most entrancing winding paths, between hedgerows of box and privet, and sometimes of laurel. The roses crawl all over it—over its walls, its imitation fallen ruins, its chopped logs which are strewn with artistic disarray in secluded nooks—for landscape gardeners are of one mind with youth; perhaps, because the most successful have never outgrown that youth! To live amid the mysterious miracles of nature keeps the heart young and brimming o'er with romance.

There is a tiny pond overwhelmed with the name Mirror Lake, because its waters are of a mirror-like quality, into which gaze lovers' eyes, as they lean over the side of a punt, forgetful of a punt's treacherous habit of spilling young love into that laughing mirror of three feet of water! In its crystal surface these fond young hearts see their own laughing eyes mirrored back, and draw closer in their embrace, heedless of those sour ones stalking the shores of the

tiny lake like some huntsman on the trail of a young doe and buck that have dipped their noses in the stream to drink, and so lost for the moment the scent of their common foe, who relentlessly trails them with death in his heart and cold lead in his rifle!

Just as the moon was beginning to show amidst the white clouds of early evening, and before the barrage went up that protected the lover and the cynical zealots alike from the danger of the Hun and his villainous hostile planes, which have so often showered death upon happy lovers, there strolled through the granite portals of the massive gateway a fragile little figure.

She was like a piece of Dresden china, so delicately carved were her features, so exquisitely moulded her slender limbs. Her tiny body breathed of love and invited one to enfold it in close embrace. On nearer inspection one could see that the blush of Springtime on those cheeks was purchased at a nearby chemist's, and that the tantalizing black curls were not all her own. The bright eyes that were filled with enticing smiles unquestionably were her own. The skin was clear beneath its rouge, but of a waxy pallor which was startling to one not accustomed to the waxen complexion of civilians in London in wartimes where food was scarce and expensive. The pretty little lips were bright

with feverish desire and opened over pearly teeth, which at once attracted, for war had caused so many teeth to be neglected. And yet, as one looked at these glittering pearls, one wondered if they, too, were not also a part of the artifice which had produced the glistening curls and the peach-like cheeks!

The brave attempt at finery, too, was also of wartime economy. The shoes were neat, but had been oft repaired, and the silken hose, which all true aristocracy of the human heart craves, were adorned with sprigs of embroidery, bud or butterfly, to conceal the many holes and drop-stitches. Yet with all the careful mending, a tiny spot above the heel of the graceful slipper revealed a tiny bit of pink flesh most alluringly and caused the eye to linger on the trim and shapely ankle. The skirt of the carefully brushed blue suit was a trifle short, from a prudish point of view, although of a length approved by the young and callow. A thin bit of net covered an entrancing bosom which rose and fell with quick, nervous breaths, as its owner walked with the velvety tread of womanhood at its daybreak.

A well-worn straw bonnet was half-buried beneath a wealth of Springtime blossoms that in their coloring outrivalled the glowing flowerbeds of the park. The swanlike neck was tantalizingly shrouded by a gauzy veil, which revealed just enough to make the beholder long to kiss its ivory whiteness. From slen-

der fingers which betrayed an artistic temperament, dangled a bright bit of embroidery disguised as a reticule for the owner's morsel of thread-broken lace called a handkerchief, and carried whatever copper pennies she still possessed.

All along the walk sat soldiers who had come out to enjoy the evening air after a depressing day of duty in the wards of the countless hospitals of the neighborhood. Here and there among these men in the monotonous rows of khaki, sat a bright bit of blue uniform with a cane or crutch at its side—inmates of some of these hospitals. All uniforms blended there in the bond of the khaki and racial lines were lost sight of in a common feeling of brotherly love and affection which fighting men have for each other.

Past these lines of benches the young gazelle daintily tripped her way, hesitating, smiling, half beckoning to the better-looking or more robust of these khaki-clad men. Here and there one moved uneasily upon the bench and shifted his position as she passed. One or two of the men laughed rather coarsely; a few attempted a rough jest, but were quickly suppressed by their mates of the bench.

Away up at the end of the walk, sat a youth of eight and ten. He was oh, so sad looking! His uniform proclaimed him a wounded man. He sat apart, gazing into distance. His eyes did not seem

to notice the beautiful stretch of lawn that swept across to the far limits of the park and stopped only because of the green hedge that confined it. He was lonely and homesick.

But the young gazelle had seen him long before she had half covered the length of that soldier-bordered walk. Her foot quickened its pace and her bounteous bosom rose and fell a trifle more nervously. Beneath the rouge crept a deeper flush, and the lips were slightly parted with eagerness, as she hurried toward him.

The youth on the bench did not notice her approach, so absorbed was he in his dreams of the faraway home nestling on the grassy meadows of Washington. Perhaps he would not have noticed her at all, had she not seated herself upon the same bench. Even then, he did not turn to look at her. She assumed a pose, and gazed across the landscape, as if she would penetrate into his dream and see what he saw. But patience was never an attribute of youth, especially when the curfew-bell would ring at 9 o'clock and turn them out of the park.

And so, she moved, ever so slightly, but her movement brought no sign from her companion on the bench. She drew forth her morsel of lace from its nest of silk and floss and waved it, ever so slightly, to waft its delicious perfume to his nostrils, as she moved it toward her feverish lips. Even this did

not arouse the youth, except to cause a slight trembling of the nostrils and the faintest suggestion of a pucker of the handsome brows, as if it suggested certain familiar odors connected with that vision which he was having—Home!

She coughed. Her dreamer heeded not.

A faint titter emanating from the rows of khaki-clad men reached her keenly alert ear and made her wince. It piqued her that she should have wasted her charms upon this coldly indifferent person at her side. It also aroused the fighting instinct, and made her the more anxious to have her prey. She had chosen him from all these men in the park because he was a wounded man, and because he seemed so lonely and so sad as he sat there aloof on that shaded, rustic bench.

She arose and shook the folds of her gown as she reseated herself. He heeded not. She moved a trifle on the bench to come in closer proximity with this indifferent youth to whom she seemed to have no fascination. She felt the gaze of those eager soldiers resting upon her as she did so. She raised the tip of her pointed chin ever so slightly and scornfully sniffed the odor of Springtime that pervaded the darkening park.

At last the youth sighed. This seemed to give her her opportunity and she made the most of it.

"Homesick, buddy?"

The youth turned his head at the voice as one startled from a reverie. He grunted an inaudible something and turned his head from her. She was watching him sharply, for this was a different type of man than those she was accustomed to. He aroused her curiosity. But he did not seem to give her opening to press her attention. She sat in silence for a few long minutes, completely baffled and trying to frame her next move of attack, for she was aroused now and bound that she would not be vanquished in her effort to control this callow lad of eight and ten. There were a score of men quivering with nervous eagerness to have her and she herself was as wildly on fire. But she had resolved to have this man at her side and none other. There wasn't anything especially attractive about him. He was just a raw-boned country lad that seemed redolent of meadows in haying time, but the bronzed skin over a firm jaw, the thatch of wavy golden brown hair, the translucent brown eye, were irresistible.

As she was observing all these characteristics, a large hand moved furtively toward his eyes, and, as it came away, she saw something moist glistening on its brawny back. With a start that sent the blood pulsating more swiftly, she realized that it was a tear. Now her womanly instinct caused her to close her lips tightly across the row of pearls. She was

all at once most sympathetic, and yet with that sympathy too great to express in words. The sight of a man in pain was a new mystery. She had never thought of men as anything but brutes, who crushed her to them and threw her aside as if she were a bruised flower-petal that had lost its perfume.

It wasn't long before the youth fidgeted on the bench and turned further from her, so that he half-faced the shrubbery which partly concealed the bench. Again the hand went toward the eyes, and again there was that glistening particle on its back as it came away. Scarce thinking, she pulled forth the wee bit of lace and pushed it awkwardly into the great paw of the man. He clutched it wonderingly. Then his emotion became too great and he laid his face on his arm and rested it on the back of the bench. From the way his chest rose and fell, she knew that he was fighting to suppress his sobs. She admired this hero for his ability to feel an emotion, whatever it sprang from.

Then he angrily sat erect and roughly shoved the bit of lace back into her hand. He started to rise, but she laid a restraining hand on his arm and whispered,

"Not yet."

His great brown orbs rested upon her face. She felt their irresistible appeal. He seemed to feel it, too, and

for an instant they looked into each other's eyes understandingly.

"It's home," he said at last.

"Yes", she breathed ever so faintly, "I thought so from the first."

"I'm homesick."

"Yes," she said again.

"I suppose you think I'm silly?" There was no response. "I came here tonight to get away from the fellows. I sat down here on this bench hoping I'd be undisturbed."

"I'm sorry," she answered with more feeling than that trite phrase usually has in London.

"You are the first person to whom I've ever admitted I was home-sick and I've been over here a year in September. My wound is coming along well enough and I'll soon be back on the line, but—but—"

She thought he was going to give way again, but he controlled himself with an effort and continued.

"I'd give anything to see that little ranch again—just once. I know I'm fighting to save that little ranch. I've a Mother there, and a Sister, and after what I've seen in Flanders!—God save them from the Hun!" He said this with such a fierceness that she involuntarily drew from him, making herself as small as possible on her part of the bench.

"The way them Huns treated the French and Bel-

gian women! My blood just boils when I think of it! I've seen their poor, pinched faces and heard their blood-curdling tales of horror. Them people are no more fit to live than so many mad-dogs. Why, a man who could find it in his heart to touch any pure woman—let alone the poor little girls—!”

He stopped quite abruptly, restrained in his impetuous maledictions by the white, startled face of the tiny woman at his side. His face softened and, in a delightfully naive, inexperienced sort of way that was a revelation to her, drew her close to his side, cuddling his big arms about her as if he would protect her from a whole regiment of Huns. She liked it—this new experience. She forgot all the eyes centered upon them curiously and just gave herself over to the full enjoyment of this new, big sensation which had come into her jaded, weary life.

So they sat for another long period of silence, which she half hoped would go on forever, for it was the one real human moment that had ever come into her poor, sordid little life. In all her memory no man had ever held her close to him with no sensation other than that of a brother protecting his sister from storm and suffering. She did not believe that any men had pure hearts or pure motives. Yet here was one who was as ingenuous as the child who had played in the garden of the Manse where she had once been a nurse-maid. That child had loved flowers and

chased the butterflies that flitted from one rose to the other. She had never understood, for she had always had to work hard from the time she could sit at a table and pick the meat from the shells of exasperating hazel-nuts! And now that she had become a faded flower that men unheeding passed by as it lay in the mud of the gutter, or snatched for a moment from its mire to hold and cast back into the slime—Now she had come to the one great experience of love in all its great, big, undefiled purity!

He crushed her still closer and her little head nestled on his big shoulder. His head leaned sidewise ever so little; his cheek rested against her forehead. It seemed deliciously soft and tender. She reached up her hand and brushed it slightly. The down was still soft upon it. She sighed and shivered with thrills of ecstasy, and, as she felt the shiver, she had the old desire sweep over her—possession! She must have this callow lad for herself. She must have that conquest recorded in the daily diary she carried in her hand-bag. It was too delicious an opportunity to let slip. His frame had trembled ever so slightly in response to her thrill. She felt that the conquest would be an easy one—and so she nestled still closer.

Then he arose and gently, quite unconcernedly, pushed her from him. She was dazed at this unceremonious way of parting. He reached for his cane, which had slipped on the grass unheeded un-

til now, grasped it firmly, and stood erect, towering to a full six feet of manliness.

He was about to leave! There was no question about it, he was going! And she had not fulfilled her purpose!

He turned toward her, raised his over-seas cap awkwardly, and said, "Good night."

"Good-night?" she repeated questioningly.

"Yes," he said, "Good night, I have to be in the hospital at nine."

"Oh," she said. Then she laid a detaining hand on his arm. "May I not go part way with you?"

He looked down at her and hesitated.

"Please?"

He could not resist that pleading any more than countless other men had done in the past. Without any further word, she arose and took hold of his free arm. Together the two walked down that long path past those rows of wondering men in khaki and blue. Some knowing ones sneered as they passed, but there were a few more thoughtful who seemed to know that one of love's miracles had taken place.

When they reached the end of the path, she did not let him turn the shorter way toward the gate.

"Come," she said, "This way is closer and it is much pleasanter to walk beneath the trees awhile longer."

So he allowed himself to be led along, not knowing

that the Siren within her was not dead, but just slumbering, ready to pounce upon him as prey.

They walked slowly. The night deepened. He glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch and saw that he must hurry if he were to be in the ward at nine. But she restrained him and he felt that he was gradually succumbing to her Delilah-like charms. It was a new experience to this country lad to be singled out by so winsome a creature. Somehow he felt flattered. It had been a long time since he had experienced a woman's tender touch, for he had been on the Mexican Border before coming across seas to be "one of Pershing's fighting men." It is easy for the bars to let down in the army. He had heard men talk of their conquests, boast about their exploits, and these remarks had but sickened him. Yet now, in the coolness of Mildmay Park, with a mocking-bird crying out in the branches over head, he felt that he was weakening and that if they did not soon reach the gate, he himself would have joined that class of which he had always been so ashamed. He tried to hurry, but her hand kept detaining him. He shook off its grasp, but it came back with a steady, ever increasing sureness and, to make it worse, she laughed each time—such a curious little insinuating laugh!

Thus it happened, that just before the curfew rang, he found himself drawn aside into some con-

venient bushes with this lovely creature clinging to him. He did not really understand what had happened. It was all as if a part of that vision that he had been beholding when the gazelle had tripped up the path and seated herself at his side on the lonely bench.

He stood up and shook her off. He reached into his pocket awkwardly and drew forth a purse. With trembling, ashamed fingers he dove down into its depths and pulled out a few coins. He extended them toward her and said in a bashful tone—

"That's all I have. I haven't been paid in six months, and at the hospital they give us \$7.50 a month or its equivalent in your confounded money, which I never can understand. Tell me what I owe you and I'll find some way to send it to you."

She shook her head and drew further from his outstretched money. Tears swelled into her eyes.

"Well, what's your price?" he asked quite bluntly, and strove to muster a friendly grin.

Again she shook her head, and the tears ran down her cheeks.

"What's the matter, little girl?" he asked sympathetically. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing—only you have hurt me."

"Hurt you?" He was all sympathy and drew her to him again, as he stood there erect in the moonlight.

"Yes," she said, "I don't sell myself."

"No?" he asked amazed in his turn, whilst a shadow crossed his face. "Then I have taken advantage of you."

"Oh, no," she said, matter-of-factly, "Not at all. I come here every night to do my bit for my Country. I give myself to the soldiers. I know what they want and I do my bit that way. I work in an ammunition factory in the daytime making shells to kill the Hun. At night I comfort the poor, homesick soldiers—like you—by giving them what they want."

He stood there looking down at her reflectively.

The curfew had commenced to ring and other couples were bestirring themselves from the grass and benches. So they started to move toward the gate a few rods away. As they passed through she stretched out her tiny hand to him.

"Good night," she said, and vanished swiftly into the darkness.

Half an hour later he hobbled into his ward and was reprimanded by the Sister in charge for coming in so late. To her questionings as to his whereabouts he replied shyly and evasively,—

"I've had a great experience tonight. It was wonderful."

But to the Buddy in the next bed he confessed sadly, "I know now why men sin. It is so easy,—and one is so homesick."

Had you been awake at midnight in that ward when all were snoring loudly, above the snores you might have heard the sobbing of a man in pain. He had shattered an ideal.

II

"A. W. O. L."

IT was a foggy night in London! It had been drizzling all day and, when night came on, the fog settled down. Fog in London is always disagreeable, although the resident has been so accustomed to it from the moment that his baby eyes opened in the grey world of London, that he does not complain as much as the stranger who comes first to its smoky, time-stained confines.

Piccadilly was shrouded in darkness. The lamps, whose blackened globes only emitted starlike rays on far-distant corners, were not sufficient to penetrate the murkiness of the heavy fog at all. The wayfarer of the night groped and stumbled his way along, frequently colliding with a pedestrian who muttered a "Sorry" and pushed past and was soon lost in the gloom.

A London fog is not a cold fog, as people of the States are wont to consider it, but it is rather agreeable—if one has become acclimated. It is penetratingly, suffocatingly damp. It drips from the roofs, it oozes on the sidewalks, it sticks to the rain-

coat. Yet, it is beautiful. Nothing is more entrancing than London's spires and towers viewed through a light fog, tinted by rays of a setting sun. But tonight it was long past sunset and the fog was too thick for anything to penetrate. There were not even the usual number of strolling girls to pluck one's hand in friendly fashion and smile and laugh and say, "'Ello, Sammy? Are yer lonesome?"

It is unfortunate that Piccadilly girls open so wide their mouths when they smile, for it spoils an otherwise agreeable impression. But despite the defects which the smile inevitably betrays, there is a winsome charm that tantalizes and makes the red blood of the adolescent soldier tingle. Red lips are always enticing and quite irresistible when one has been weary months in the front line Flanders' mud. Well, who has the heart to blame him? Only some slacker who has remained at home and not tasted of the hardships of war.

It was in such a foggy night that the chestnut-eyed youth from Lake Washington found himself feeling his way in the darkness which enshrouded the unfamiliar Strand. He had left the hospital, a cavalier on venture bent. But now he found himself less dapper, chilled by the dampness of the fog. His plume—if one may so term the wavy bit of "dough-boy pompadour" which protruded over his right eye, for the sake of carrying out the metaphor of a

knight errant,—his plume, I say, was quite wet, the foggy drops sparkling like diamonds, when he paused under a street-lamp to try to find his bearings. Truly, one needed a compass here as much as in the forests of Argonne!

He was thus standing under a lamp, when a maiden of Piccadilly came upon him. It was some seconds before he was fully aware of her presence. Indeed, he was too busy with the question, "Where do we go from here?" to have noticed her at all, had she not finally pinched his arm and said, pleasantly,—

"'Ello, Sammy, lost?"

He grinned back at her and grunted, "Beaucoup!"

That was rather a funny sort of an answer to make, but it is one that the soldier with a meagre knowledge of French is always employing regardless of the grammatical accuracy or suitability of the expression. She was familiar with the American soldier and comprehended what he meant,—hopelessly lost. She smiled sympathetically.

"On furlough?" His raincoat hid his wound stripes, had he worn any, and he had managed to leave the hospital with a complete uniform borrowed from the good-natured orderly in his ward.

"Oui."

"Been in any engagements?"

"Beaucoup."

"Wounded?"

"Twice."

"Where are you going?"

"Most anywhere—doesn't much matter."

"First time you have been in London?"

"Yes."

"I'm the girl you want, Sammy! Hook your arm in mine and let's stroll."

He did not hesitate to do so. He didn't know where he was nor where they should stroll, but it was better to be moving than standing under the sickly gas with your teeth chattering. They moved along. He felt sure that it was in the wrong direction, but it was so late now that it made little matter. He had been checked "A. W. O. L." at the hospital two hours ago and would be court-martialed for being "absent without leave" in the morning. He might as well enjoy the rest of the night. And so they strolled.

For a time they walked in silence, occasionally slipping into a shadowy doorway as they approached an "M. P." patrolling the streets to gather up just such wanderers as our knight-errant, to take them to the Provost Marshal for summary treatment. All "M. P.'s" are "heartless birds" from the soldier's point of view. If one has not a pass, he is most relentless.

After awhile she said, "Aren't you hungry?"

That was a very embarrassing question, for just

now he did not have so much as a four-pence for the bus back from Trafalgar Square. He had had two shillings when he left the hospital at two o'clock, borrowed from the Buddy in the next bed, but he had spent them at Eagle Hut for supper and a few Woodbine cigarettes.

"You must be hungry," she said again.

"Not particularly. I had supper at Eagle Hut," he murmured.

She laughed merrily. "Oh, I know, you've spent all your shillings!"

He nodded, looking as solemn as an owl. Some say that the English are lacking a sense of humor. Maybe so. But this maid of Piccadilly did not seem to be. She laughed again, grasped his arm still more firmly, and became more friendly.

"That's quite all right", she said, "I didn't want you to take me anywhere—to eat."

"No?" he queried in some surprise, for his experience with girls had been that they were always wanting to steer a fellow into the nearest restaurant or sweet-shop.

"Besides, the restaurants are all closed at this hour. London isn't what it was before the war," she sighed—the sigh was unmistakably a sad one. He glanced downward and the light of the corner showed she had a black band with a gold star on

her arm. He clumsily pressed her arm against his side and fumbled to take her hand.

Holding her hand in his, they walked a few more squares and then stopped short. What caused them to both stop at the same instant, one could not say. But they did and he, quite as suddenly, drew her close to him, pressing his lips firmly to hers. It was such a big brotherly sort of a kiss that no girl, no matter how circumspect and demure, would have thought of resenting it—especially from a "wounded soldier." That kiss was the beginning of the end. He had tasted of the sweetness of those lips, he had felt the liteness of that little form, he had felt the little heart throb ecstatically against his own bigger, stronger one. Man has always been easily tempted and falls easily, usually picking himself up and brushing off the incident more lightly than he could a bit of dust incurred in a friendly wrestling tussle with his Buddy.

After a while she said, "Come over to my flat. I will fix up a bite of bread and cheese and make a little tea."

Without a word he acquiesced and they began picking their way along Oxford Street, toward High Holborn, to one of the flats not so far from the Kingsway. It was a slow process, and for any but a Londoner would have been a hopeless one on such a

murky night. The few taxis and abundant busses seemed to run as wildly as if it were bright sunlight. Several times they barely avoided being run down by one or other of them.

At length they reached the dark building where she resided. They climbed the filthy little staircase to the fourth floor. She fumbled in a shabby pocket-book for her latch-key, finally unlocked the pine door, and pushed him inside.

"Stand there or you may fall over something," she warned, groping her way to a mantelpiece where she finally found some matches and lighted the gas-light on the shabby stand.

"Here, sit down, you are tired," she said, and gave him a friendly push into a large upholstered chair that smelled of mildew and age. "I'll start the fire in a twinkling."

She darted into a tiny doorway and was heard fumbling around. In an instant she came back with a scuttle of coke and a few sticks of wood. She got down on her knees to build a fire in the tiny grate that scarce held a shovelful of coals. He offered to assist her, but she pushed him off and said,

"You'd make a muck of it! I'm used to this fire."

Thus he sat still in the chair, his hands clasped against his lower lip, his brow wrinkled in perplexity. He watched her and wondered how he had allowed himself so easily to be led here. It wasn't

long before the coke began to catch and turn red. He leaned back in his chair, stretched his rather shapely hands toward the tiny warmth, and decided that the best thing that he could do was to give himself over to the pleasures of the moment and not think of the "tomorrow" and the stern Major who had forgotten that he had once been young himself, and perhaps had been "absent without leave," too.

The fire started, she got up, patted his wavy head affectionately, started into the little adjoining kitchen, and was soon heard singing merrily,

Beautiful Katie, Oh beautiful Katie,
You're the only, only girl that I adore;
And when the moon shines over the cowshed,
I'll be waiting at the kitchen door.

It brought back memories of his home away off in Washington and he seemed to see the cows feeding in the green meadows just as they are pictured in the advertisements of a certain brand of evaporated cream. He wiped a tear from the corner of his eye and tried to blot out the picture.

Then she came forth with a tablecloth over one arm and a trayful of china and tableware.

"You might pull that table in front of the fire," she suggested, nodding her head toward one standing against the opposite wall. In a trice he had obeyed and was helping her lay the cloth. He enjoyed this

occupation exceedingly—the first since he left the ranch back there on the Pacific Slope. It was great fun, broken every while by a few stolen kisses, which she allowed him with small show of resistance. “He wished she would struggle a little more. It was so much more fun to kiss a girl who really resisted one!”

Then he was left alone, whilst she got the eatables. The tiny kettle of water she placed in the coals of the grate with the admonishment,

“Don’t let the water burn!” He grabbed her and hugged her and planted another kiss on her ruddy lips. She broke away with a laugh, brushed up the hair he had tousled, and fled into the kitchen.

The repast ready, they sat down opposite at the tiny table to enjoy it. It wasn’t much, just some bread and cheese, a morsel of jam, a piece of cold fried fish, and a great cup of tea without sugar or milk. But it was such a homey sort of an affair, and the two hearts were so young and so innocent that it seemed like a banquet spread for royalty itself. Indeed, it protracted itself into a banquet in length of time, for they held hands across the table, fed one another, sipped tea from the same cup, and whispered sweet nothings which each forgot as soon as uttered. Great Ben would have sounded Two A. M. when it ended, had its tongue not been silenced as a “war measure.”

He shoved back his chair and arose.

"I must be going," he said awkwardly. "I didn't know it was so late."

"Is it late?" she asked rather naively for one who seemed so innocent.

"Yes," he said, "it is past two o'clock."

"Oh," she said with a pout, "I'm sorry."

"So am I. It has been a perfectly wonderful night. I've enjoyed every minute of it."

"How far did you come?" she asked.

"Mildmay," he answered.

"Mildmay?" she repeated in surprise.

"Yes. I am a patient there."

"Oh," she said. "But you do not wear 'hospital blues'?"

"No; I borrowed this uniform from the orderly in my ward."

"Oh, aye."

He went to feel for a handkerchief and discovered his absence of funds. He bit his lip and looked perplexed.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

He blushed and hesitated, but she got up and took his shoulders between her tiny hands and looked him squarely in the face.

"Tell me," she insisted.

He still hesitated, but as she persisted he finally said, "I haven't the price of a bus."

"Oh!" Then she paused. Finally she said, "Neither have I."

"No?"

"No. I spent my last penny for the supper we had tonight."

"I am sorry," he said, kissing her hair lightly. "And we have eaten up your breakfast, too, I suspect."

She did not answer, but he knew that they had. He held her close to him again, and she nestled against his bosom. He smoothed her hair awkwardly.

"How do you live?" he asked at length when he had sufficiently swallowed the lump in his throat to speak clearly.

"Oh, anyway," she said evasively.

He held her at arm's length and looked straight at her. She turned aside her face, looking down at the shabby carpet. In her face, which now he scrutinized for the first time carefully, he read the sad story. Then he pulled her to him again and murmured:

"Poor little girl, poor little girl!"

It was the first time that she had human sympathy in so long that she broke down completely. She laid her head on his shoulder and cried. She felt for her handkerchief, but he shoved his khaki one into her hand. She wiped her little red eyes on it and

nestled closer. And so another half hour had passed before either realized it. He placed her carefully in the arm-chair before the fire and moved toward the door.

As he placed his hand on the knob, she turned, and reached out an appealing hand toward him.

"Please don't leave me—yet," she said. "This is the first time I've tasted a bit of human sympathy since the War started."

"I have to get back to the hospital."

"No bus is running now,—not until six o'clock," she said.

"Well, I suppose it is too far to walk——"

"And too foggy," she completed.

Weakly he sat down again and stared into the red coals. The red coals, the weepy girl so close beside him, again lit the fires that he had been trying so fiercely to exterminate all evening. He could hear the Ingersoll on his wrist ticking off the seconds.

Bye-and-bye she got up and moved about the apartment. She threw the shabby, greasy-finger soiled cushions from the couch in the corner. She pulled back its tawdry imitation-Bagdad spread, and revealed a cheap bed, or a substitute for one. Then she came over and, leaning above the back of his chair, she began to unhook the collar of his blouse. He reached up and caught her two hands in his and held them firmly, looking up into her shiny eyes.

He trembled with emotion; she bent her lips and kissed his brow.

The sun was struggling through the torn paper shade when he opened his eyes and realized where he was. He recalled that he had been "A. W. O. L." all night and that ahead of him lay that sour old Major and a gloomy "hoosgow." Already she was moving around the room making tea, and a breakfast of the few crumbs that they had left at the feast of the night. She was still singing the only refrain that she seemed to know,

Beautiful Katie, Oh beautiful Katie,
You're the only, only girl that I adore;
And when the moon shines over the cowshed,
I'll be waiting at the kitchen door.

As he watched her in the relentless rays of the morning sun, with his own soul free from passion, repentant and remorseful, he could not help but feel that she had forgotten him and was already thinking of "her way" of earning an existence. He felt resentful to have been only "an incident" in her experiences! He waited for her to go into the kitchen. Then he got up and dressed quickly before she should return, for he felt a boy's natural modesty and shame, and was now anxious to be away from this "episode" which he regretted extremely.

When she returned he was fully dressed, raincoat and all, ready to go. She was surprised, but concealed the fact, persisting that he have a cup of tea first.

Although it nearly choked him to drink it, he swallowed it down quickly, scalding his mouth doing so, refused the proffered bread, and arose.

He wondered what he could say, for he hated to lie. Yet this woman had befriended him for the night, had given him the affection that his poor heart had been craving for more than a year, and yet—yet—somehow he knew that it had all been wrong, their relations, that he had done something for which he was terribly ashamed, terribly repentant.

He forced himself to take again her proffered hand, mumbled a "Thank you," and stumbled for the door. As he was opening it, she put something into his pocket. She held his wrist firmly as he thrust his hand in to see what it was.

"Please, please keep it."

He looked at her in questioning surprise.

"What is it?" Now he felt some coins.

"Your bus fare."

He went to take it out.

"No, don't. I found it in my pocket-book this morning. You will need it to get back to the hospital this morning. You made me very happy last night. Don't spoil it all by refusing the little gift

I have to give you. I am glad I could do so much for a soldier."

She pushed him through the half-open doorway, and closed the door after him.

He stopped outside on the rug and hesitated. Within he thought that he could hear sobbing. He laid his hand on the knob and started to rap. Then he thought better of it, turned away, and slowly descended the stairs out into the morning light. After an instant of indecision as to direction, he turned into Holborn and made for the tube-station and the hospital.

All the way back in the Underground he felt the weight of a guilty conscience. Yet, somehow, he felt that after all he did perhaps give real pleasure and comfort to a soul wearied by war and the necessity of earning an existence and that he ought, perhaps, to be happy rather than regretful.

The Major was waiting for him at Mildmay when he walked in. He did not deny the charge of "A. W. O. L." To the question, "What have you to say?" he merely answered,

"It was worth it."

He took his sentence of six days in the "hoos-gow" and fine of ten days' pay like a good soldier. But the memory of that little girl went with him to be both a blessing and a curse.

III

PEGGY

IT had been raining all day. It is either raining or foggy in London. One wonders why the people who live there are not all bent and crippled with rheumatism, but they seem to thrive in the dampness. The lovely pink and white complexions of the young girls seem to recommend the climate as a beauty-tonic. Until one becomes acclimated, he shivers in the dampness and curses under his breath the Hun who compelled him to cross the ocean to exist in this abominable climate.

In the wards the patients had been restless and fretful. They had played blackjack for cigarettes, or shot craps surreptitiously in the bathrooms. The sicker ones had pieced jigsaw puzzles, worked their eyes weary with intricate embroidery stitches on belts which they were decorating with the flags of the Allies, or tired their fingers with raffia basketry, or in carving toys.

Dinner had tasted worse than usual; supper had been quite impossible. The endless mutton-stew palled on the appetite and revolted the stomach, and

the bread seemed old and tough. Not that the meals were so awfully bad to a lad who had served in the front lines of France, but so rainy a day with no sunshine had stirred up the spirit of revolt. The phonograph had ground out its endless tunes from 5.30 in the morning until now, seven o'clock of the evening. For some reason the Red Cross Entertainers, "The Pink and White Pierrots," had failed to materialize, and the Y. M. C. A. Secretary had found it impossible to secure a film to fill in the gap left by the non-appearance of the Pierrots. Thus a dull evening was following a dull day. A few had put on their knit-nightcaps, and pulled the bedcovers over their heads, determined to sleep and forget the misery of the world without.

There were others who could hobble about on crutches or canes, or even perambulate in rickety wheel-chairs, and they were determined to wander abroad on pleasure bent. The seven o'clock check had been taken. They were free until nine. So the procession of the lame, the blind, and the halt, with the halt leading the blind, was moving slowly and painfully toward the iron gates which enclosed the hospital from the gaping eyes of Mildmay Park North.

Halfway up the street in the shadows of the brick, vine-clad wall stood Peggy. Once upon a time she used to visit the hospital, until the officer in charge

of the Receiving Ward decided that her presence was not for the best interest of the patients whom she visited. Now she had to linger amid the shadows of the wall and wait for the patients to come out to her. Life in a hospital is cruel, it seemed to Peggy and a certain few of her admirers. But Peggy was still determined to bring happiness in her own way, according to her own crude, vulgar notions of what constituted happiness for the Doughboy. And so, despite the weepy heavens and the darkness of the night, Peggy stood, wrapped in her cheap, showy furs, sure that some of the boys would soon be coming down the street, needing her ministering comforts after a cheerless day.

Peggy was the product of wartime London. Her Father had died in the drive at Verdun. Her Mother had been compelled to work in a neighboring ammunition factory, which was camouflaged as a piano manufactory. The younger children had all found jobs of one sort or another. She herself had found work in a factory up the street from the hospital, where she sewed on khaki uniforms for soldiers. Nights and Sundays were her own; she used that time in amusing soldiers.

She stood shifting from one weary foot to the other, striving to penetrate the darkness of the street between her and the dark gates now discharging the patients.

The patients were being taken in charge by girls and women as rapidly as they were emitted through the gateway. They were disappearing down the streets and nearby alleys, or lining the low brick-wall opposite, but Peggy was not discouraged. She knew that the more desirable ones would come walking along the wall, bound for Eagle Hut or the Movie at the corner. She stood, therefore, and waited.

Peggy had no especial likes or dislikes. A man, so long as he wore the khaki or hospital blues, was quite as good as any other man. She found zest in variety and she certainly had found it since Fate had led her first to Mildmay Park and its neighboring hospital.

Clattering hobnails and clinking cane made her adjust her black toque, tuck in a lock quite as incorrigible as Peggy herself, hitch her shabby foxskins on her rather bare neck, and ply her piece of American Spearmint gum more assiduously.

As the clatter reached her in the darkness, she stretched out a hand in a shabby glove and plucked the clatterer toward her.

"'Ello, Sammy," she said, leering in a silly, ingenué way, forgetful that night and its shadows hid her charms.

The soldier paused. That pause was the beginning of his downfall. When one stopped to listen to Peggy, he was no longer accountable for what he

might do. She had a charm of manner that was wholly irresistible to the soldier, as scores of men can testify.

"Ain't it late to be out, Sammy?" she queried in her Cockney brogue.

"Oh, I dunno," answered the lad whom she had pulled in from the darkness.

"Been a wet day, ain't it?"

"Rather."

"Don't feel in too cheery a mood, Sammy, do you?"

"No."

"'Ave a cigarette?" and, diving into a pocket of her jacket, she brought forth a package of perfumed ones and offered them to him.

"Thanks, no," he said, recalling that the Red Cross man had warned the patients against women who offered men drugged cigarettes and later robbed them.

"Oh, do," she urged, and lit one between her pretty lips.

"I'd rather not," he was saying, but she laughed and shoved the lighted cigarette between his large, voluptuous lips. Then she lighted one for herself and began to smoke with a graceful ease, free from self-consciousness and pose, proclaiming herself an adept.

"Goin' anywhere?"

"Nowhere in particular."

"Better stick here a bit with me."

"It is wet here."

"Oh, you'll soon forget that, Sammy." He pulled the cigarette from his lips and tossed it into the gutter mistrustfully. The girl laughed at the movement.

"I hadn't ought to mind a little wet after Flanders, had I?" He laughed in a soft, boyish voice that quite won Peggy's heart.

"Right-o," she replied warmly.

"I'd ask you to a show, but I haven't been paid since I come over," he apologized.

"Oh, that's all right, Sammy," she answered. "I'm not a grafter."

Peggy had learned quite a bit of American slang from the scores of Doughboys with whom she had become acquainted in the year that America had been in the War. She was proud of her ability to use it—it pleased the lads and made them feel less homesick.

"You'll get deuced wet out here. The trees and vines are dripping all over you," he remarked as a big drop splashed down the tip of her pointed nose and rolled off upon her more pointed chin.

"Oh, rats!" she replied. "I was born in London, an' I ain't afraid of no bit o' rain-water!" She wiped her nose and chin, and powdered them afresh with a

dirty puff that had been in constant service since the beginning of the War.

She hooked her arm through his in a friendly fashion and nestled her head against his shoulder. Sammy was somewhat taken back. He had met London girls of her type, the streets at night were filled with them; but this one was the most unconventional in her addresses thus far. However, "when in Rome do as Rome does," ran through his head, and he followed the motto, "In wartime a man isn't responsible for what he does." So he took the cuddling very good-naturedly, rubbed his velvety cheek against hers, and laughed. Then he took her little hand in his, and, hooking his cane over his arm, began limping along the street with the charming little war-worker.

They turned the corner of the wall, where the street was not quite so public, and stopped short. Peggy had no notion of wandering too far from her post, nor had she any intention of wasting the entire evening on one lone Sammy, when there were a dozen or so equally lonely and equally anxious to meet Peggy. Peggy was a supreme egoist, as you can readily see, and knew her charms irresistible unto all men. Well, poor little thing, who would deny her that bit of happiness in a sordid, miserable life of hard work, drudgery, and scant to eat? She loved life and joy like any normal girl and these had been

denied her. So she nestled and cuddled with this Sammy, billing and cooing in her most alluring way. It was dark, so that the pallid face hidden beneath layers of rouge and powder was not perfectly visible. She was saturated with a cheap perfume. But to the homesick, lonely doughboy, after the weary day of gloom in the ward, she seemed like an angel sent from heaven. He gave himself over to the full enjoyment of the moment. He did not have to make any advances or strive to talk; Peggy did all this. He was settled down happily enjoying the evening with its forbidden fruits, blessing the hour that sent him to Peggy—or Peggy to him—when she quite unceremoniously announced,

“Better run along home, Sammy. Nursie’ll be waiting to check you in!”

He started to protest that he hadn’t been out twenty minutes yet, but Peggy was obdurate and, taking his arm, led him back again along the street toward the sickly yellow streak of light escaping downward from the darkened globes that marked the hospital’s iron gateway. She talked no more, but forced him along, her arm firmly linked in his, hurrying at a rate that was rapidly taking his breath, for his wound was not fully healed and he walked with difficulty when unsupported by the faithful cane.

They had traversed only half the distance toward

the gate, when steps were heard approaching them from behind. Peggy slackened her step. She unloosed her grip of the Doughboy's arm and turned about on the walk, facing toward the steps. He stopped in surprise to see what it was. Peggy had left him and was proceeding toward the approaching footsteps.

"Peggy," he called.

Peggy did not heed. She kept walking slowly away.

"Why, Peggy, you are not leaving me?" he wailed after her.

Peggy stopped short, turned around toward him abruptly and said,

"Oh, gwan in with you! You sure don't think you're the only gink in that horsepital what wants me, do yer? Run along in out of the rain!"

She turned her back on him and walked off.

For several minutes he stood staring in blank astonishment at her retreating form which five minutes ago he had been holding close to his beating heart, listening to her heart pulsating in return and recklessly sipping kisses from her brilliant carmined lips, all thought of any other happiness shut from his mind. Now here he stood deserted in the darkness, the rain falling relentlessly, penetrating his hospital blues, and wetting him to the very skin. And she was hastening to greet some one else! "Who was it?" he

wondered. "Was it some English sweetheart—a brother, perhaps, come out to find her." He hesitated, then decided to ascertain. Forgetful of the hazard that he was running, he turned about and tip-toed up the street after the vanished Peggy.

He came upon her sooner than he had anticipated. Indeed, he almost collided with her in the darkness. He was just in time to hear her say:

"'Ello, Sammy," and almost could descry the little hand which she reached out to pluck the arm of the newcomer.

It was a painful shock. He leaned back in the shadowy protection of the old brick wall and its over-hanging vines, trying to suppress the excited beatings of his heart, lest its wild thumpings betray his proximity. If it did, Peggy was quite self-possessed. She gave no evidence of noticing that he had followed her and was standing there almost within arm's length.

He listened to her words, as she began to accost the newcomer, and, as that chap replied, he recognised the voice of the Buddy in the next bed at the hospital. He waited to see what would happen. He was not astonished when this lad, too, fell a victim to the soft, persuasive Peggy and vanished with her up the street along the same stones that he himself had hobbled with her not thirty minutes before. He laughed sardonically beneath his breath.

"He'll get all that's coming to him!" he muttered. "And it serves him right, too, for being made a fool of by a woman!"

He turned on his heel in disgust, and hobbled toward the hospital lights. It had been a sickish day and a more sickish night. He cursed himself for coming out at all. He cursed himself still more for having allowed himself to be made a fool of by a girl like Peggy, whose motives were so obvious and who had no shame or modesty to make effort to conceal her coarse purposes. He feared, too, the consequences of close association with her.

He passed into the hospital grounds. The good-natured old porter at the gate, who had been there for half a century, commented on the wetness and darkness of the night forcing him back in rather early. He was not in a humor for bantering chatter, however, and grunted meaninglessly in reply.

He took a short-cut across the muddy driveway toward the Receiving Ward, anxious to see the big-hearted Sergeant, who might give him a word of sympathy. He pushed open the doors, unceremoniously entered, and seated himself on the long bench before the counter. He was the picture of misery as he sat there.

At last the Sergeant finished his never-ending key pounding and said,

"What's wrong, Buddy? You look as if you had

lost your last friend in the world! Bad news from home?"

"No," he snapped. "Just been made a fool of!"

"Oh? That's nothing new, is it?"

"And by a woman!"

"Yes?"

He was growing angry. The Sergeant seemed quite indifferent.

"And you would have been made a fool of, too, if you'd only stopped and spoken to Peggy!" he cried in exasperation.

"Perhaps," answered the Sergeant. "But I should not have stopped to speak to Peggy."

"You couldn't have resisted her," he persisted.

"Couldn't I?"

"No."

"Well, perhaps not. But you shouldn't have stopped to speak to her."

"I couldn't help myself."

The Sergeant raised his brows in a questioning way that forced a lad to desperation.

"She grabbed my arm and pulled me toward her. She forced me to walk with her—she—she——" The Sergeant was starting to pound the Underwood again. "See here," he cried, "if you'd seen as much of the world as I have——"

The Sergeant stopped hammering the keys, and

looked at the lad from the Northwest in a compassionate sort of way and shook his head sadly.

"Say, Buddy," he began, "don't talk to me about 'seeing as much of the world as you have.' I have knocked around most of its corners. I have seen a deal more roughness than you ever dreamed of. If I had commenced early enough, I might have been your Father almost. But I have made it a rule never to talk to these girls who loiter along wall or street corners. If you would take my advice——"

But the boy from Washington was hobbling away. In a moment the banging of the door at the far end of the Receiving Ward proclaimed that he had departed for some other spot, where he might find a more sympathetic soul to listen to his tale of woe.

"Disillusioned youth," mused the Sergeant, continuing to work on the steamer-list upon which he found the name of the lad who had just angrily slammed the door behind him.

Halfway down the walk the unhappy youth stopped to look at the time. He discovered that the gold watch which he had had in his pocket was gone! But he did not go back to tell the Sergeant.

IV

THE CONDUCTOREEN

EVERY day when he went into town on bus No. 39 he met her.

She was rather pretty in blowzy sort of way, suggestive of wild roses along a country lane. Indeed, as he came to know later, she lived in one of those pretty thatch-roofed cottages hedged with roses, at the extreme North end of the bus-line. When the bus passed her home, she always waved her hand at some one just within the shadow of the lace curtains, not distinctly visible to the world without. He knew this, too, because he had once ridden on the bus to the extreme limit out of curiosity to know where it went on its wanderings, and also to talk a little longer with the pretty girl of the omnibus. He admired her trim uniform of dark blue serge, her neat high-laced black boots, the flat black oilcloth hat with its chin-strap, not unlike the trench-hats with which he had had so much experience. She was a good fellow, too, and could enjoy a cigarette and a rough jest as well as a Buddy of the trenches. When standing at Victoria Station, she never dared

smoke, for it was strictly forbidden when on duty, and there were too many jealous eyes watching for an infraction of the rules in order to secure her envied place as conductor on a bus.

It was marvelous, the dexterity with which she could get up and down the narrow, circular staircase at the rear of the bus. It was astonishing to watch how she kept tabs on the people getting on and off, even when on the top collecting fares and ringing them up in the funny metal box suspended by straps from her shoulders. When on top she had the habit of either stamping her shapely foot loudly to warn the motorman that all was well and to go ahead, or, if near the front, she would lean over the bus-rail and strike sharply with the palm of her hand the metal advertising signs that encircled it. She never lost her balance, although the bus reeled and careened like a ship of the desert. The Doughboy oft compared it to the sickly sensation which he had one day experienced—that one day at Dreamland, Coney Island, before he had sailed—that one day of reckless freedom and wild mirth given him in New York.

He had spent that day riotously, for he recked nought of consequences. He was bound for "over there," and "over the top with the best of luck," and had scant hopes of ever again seeing his native land. Now, in London, with all that behind him, he was

still going the reckless, hapless pace, indifferent to all his finer instincts, for, having done his bit for his country and having come out with nothing worse than some bits of shrapnel, which had slightly impeded his locomotion, and a touch of phosgene, he was quite all right. It might be that the old Colonel in charge of the Medical Wards was not so satisfied as to his condition, and had recommended him for home and a recuperation camp in the Rockies, but that did not trouble him.

His youth was upon him, with all the reckless, happy-go-lucky airs and freedom from cares. He was seeing the world. The Army had given him that opportunity which, had it not been for a World at War, would never have been his. He had behind him only the experiences of a ranch in the Northwest and a visit once a year to a large city a hundred miles away. Beyond that, his life had never reached out. He was making the most of every moment "seeing London." He never went to the historic places; they had no interest for him.

"Why," he commented when walking down the celebrated Strand with its glorious old buildings, beautiful in their smoky-grime and weather-stains, "why, back in New York——" How quickly he had laid claim to that city because he had one day been there! "Back in New York, we'd tear down them old unsanitary houses, and put up new, clean, modern

buildings!" You can judge from that how irreverent he was. But such is youth!

Eagle Hut he knew well. No matter where else he went when out for the afternoon, he went there—sometimes for a bite to eat, sometimes for the pictures in the early evening, or the program later. But be it admitted, he wasn't always keen on the program offered, especially if it happened to be a dry old lecture on "The Aborigines (he did not know what that meant!) of Borneo and the South Sea Islands," or "The Psychology of the War." But if it was a magician or a Jazz Band!—Oh, boy!—he always stayed until the very last number, and applauded loudly, shrieked for more, using his stock phrase, "Beaucoup! Beaucoup!" and later called the affair "Très bon!" when he got back to the hospital at Mildmay Park.

When riding on the bus, he often tried to get the corner seat, just inside the door, so that he could openly and unabashed make sheep's-eyes at the pretty "Conductoreen," as he termed her. She would grin, blush, and look toward the sidewalk in search of prospective passengers. She appeared to be annoyed by his open advances. Secretly, however, she was pleased, for she admired his huskiness, his brown eyes, his wavy hair, made more bewitching by the fetching angle at which he tilted his cap over one ear and cocked it forward over his right eye.

She always made great show of taking his arm to assist him on and off the bus, not that he needed such help, but because it gave her opportunity to feel the muscular biceps of his arms. It sent a thrill of desire through her frame and caused her heart to go wildly pitter-patting within her tailored bosom!

He liked to feel her hand on his arm, and was as slow in ascending and descending as the traffic rules and the crush of passengers would permit. He often rode many blocks out of his way to find a corner where no one else was alighting, so that he could monopolize the Conductoreen's attentions, descend more laggardly, grasp her hand at the end, as if to steady himself, and clasp her hand as she passed him his cane when he at length stood on the sidewalk. It was wicked, the way that he played with that poor girl's sentimental feelings—toward soldiers. Mark you, "soldiers," for she had a weakness for them—especially wounded soldiers. She had a string of them, too, but he did not know that—bless him!—and thought himself the sole pearl in her string.

Then, growing bolder, he rode to the extreme North end of the bus line, and she, tired from standing an hour on the jogging, jolting rear platform, where her teeth chattered together as if they would break, she sat down beside him in the bus. The motorman had gone off into a public house for a glass of ale to quench his unquenchable thirst and he had

her all to himself. He made the most of those ten blessed moments. He offered her a Camel, which she gratefully accepted, making no apologies for smoking. He lighted it for her between his teeth, starting it, and then placing it between her lips. He could not help admiring her rather good teeth, although he knew that most of them must be false. Her bright, luscious lips were full of bewitching invitation which he found it difficult to resist. He drew forth a cigarette for himself and he thrilled when she persisted in holding it between those luscious lips whilst he lit it. Then, after several inhalations, she placed it between his own kissable lips, and smiled so bewitchingly and leaned back so luxuriously against the carpet of the seat, that he moved uneasily and shifted his position a trifle.

His right hand slipped out and grasped hers. As she only smiled, he grew bolder and thrust his left arm about her good-sized waist. She laughed. He squeezed her a bit; she giggled, and made a faint show of resistance. Then he tightened his grasp and drew her closer. She made a sort of protest—just enough to add to the piquancy of the moment and make herself more alluringly feminine. Her hair brushed his cheek; he rubbed his face against it. She laughed, cuddled her head on his shoulder, turned her big, saucy blue eyes upward, and gazed into his fearlessly and unashamed. A great smile

spread across her mouth and cheeks to her very ears.

It was more than he could endure with equanimity. He folded her close to his breast and planted a great, big, wholesome kiss on her laughing red lips. He caught a strong odor of young onions, but that did not daunt him; he entered with a gusto into the joys of that intoxicating moment.

The motorman, returning from the public house, wiping his mouth with the back of his grimy hand, ended it all. She sat up in a jiffy, all decorum, smoothing her tousled hair, and blushing furiously—just as if this had been her first experience! Oh, what artless creatures these women of her class are! How they lead a poor chap a merry dance, tantalizing, inviting, rejecting, and again enticing until——!

Thus that wonderful ten minutes passed and came to its end like all joys must do! But he had it for a glorious remembrance and a triumph to place in his long list of such triumphs. He rode back on the top of the bus, humming a tune all the way. The words ran like this—

Just a little love, a little kiss,
Just an hour that holds a world of bliss;
Eyes that tremble like the stars above me,
And the little word that says You love me.
Just a little love, a little kiss,
I would give you all my life for this,
As I hold you fast and bend above you,
And I hear you whispering, 'I love you!'

It was a song that he had heard at the Empire and he had liked it at once. He found it suited his mood often in London. It seemed appropriate now with the memory of that intoxicating ten minutes inside the bus.

She happened to be on the top collecting fares when they passed the thatch-roofed house with its mysterious person behind the shadow of the curtain. He saw the movement behind the lace and saw her wave her hand in its direction. It piqued his curiosity to know who it was that lived there. He decided that it was her home, but was it her Mother? her invalid Father for whom she slaved so many hours on a bus? Who? It troubled him and kept interfering with the burden of his song, so that he would stop abruptly, then begin again, and stop quite as abruptly for no accountable reason. He pondered and pondered, but to all his questionings he could find no satisfactory answer.

He was still pondering when the bus came to the Black Watch, where he alighted for the hospital. He took as long as usual—perhaps a trifle longer—in descending; she was as solicitous as always, assisting him just as ardently. It took a mighty effort on his part not to throw his arms wildly about her and kiss her passionately once again, but she took good care that he had no such opportunity and yanked the swinging bell-cord viciously, as he stood hesitating whether to risk so public an em-

brace. The bus rumbled away with its Conductoreen swaying on its tailboard, and vanished in the intricate windings of the thoroughfare.

His sleep was disturbed that night. He tossed so restlessly that the good Sister in charge of his ward was almost persuaded that going out daily was too much of a nervous strain on his constitution, and considered the advisability of suggesting to the young Lieutenant, when he came in the morning to make his rounds, that pass privileges should be taken away from him for a few days.

But fortunately she did not do that and the next afternoon at two found him on the corner in front of the Black Watch awaiting his bus, and its Conductoreen.

At last she came. He made the same great show of helplessness and was assisted on with the same earnest solicitude as always. He made his customary sheep's-eyes at her, but, although she responded, there seemed to be more of the mechanical than formerly, not so much latent passion lying beneath the veiling black eyelashes. He felt that her soul was troubled. He wondered if his little indiscretion of yesterday had anything to do with it.

He was determined to find out at the first opportunity and went clear to Victoria Station. But he sat on top, being forced to leave his favorite corner, as she persisted that "it was really too nice a day for

him to stick inside, when there were so many seats in the open on top of the bus." She did this not so much because of solicitude for him as to escape the persistency of his flirtation. Even the motorman was somehow becoming aware of it. Perhaps the little oblong piece of mirror fixed to the projection over his head shows more within the bus than we are cognizant as we sit there indulging in these playful flirtations. Only one who has ridden on that seat can tell us that.

He had no opportunity to speak with her on the long way back, either. Nor was there a seat available inside the bus. So he did the natural thing—rode to the extreme North end once again, resolved to sip the honey of her ruby lips. His very tongue kept protruding and wiping his feverish lips, much like a dog when he feels especially good-natured. He was making a ridiculous fool of himself, and at last he began to feel that the other passengers were noticing it and suspecting the object of his passion. They didn't, but he felt his own sense of guilt, despite that fact. He was painfully self-conscious, occasionally flushing to the roots of his hair, as some old man or woman glanced in his direction with, he fancied, a reproving frown.

When they got to the end of the line, where the bus stopped for its usual ten minutes, and the motorman went into the public house for his usual

glass of ale, he climbed down from the top with the intention of renewing his attentions of yesterday. Much to his surprise, the bus was quite empty. He had been so occupied with the business of getting down that he had not seen his heart's desire leave the bus and disappear within the shadows of the public house. Although he waited and watched for her reappearance, she did not come during all that long ten minutes—minutes which had yesterday seemed all too short. Indeed, the motorman came out and climbed into his seat, first having cranked the engine and started the motor buzzing, emitting nauseating hot fumes from the rear of the bus. He clanked his gong impatiently. He moved the bus a few feet closer to the public house and again clanked the bell.

At length she hurried out. There seemed to be red rings under her eyes, as if she had been weeping, but since her nose was powdered white, he could not verify the fact by any possible redness. She did not notice her passenger. He felt peeved, quite annoyed. She busied herself with her book, making entries, counting bits of paper, punching trip-tickets, and giving him no chance to say a word to her.

A few more turns of the road and passengers began to fill the bus. His last chance to speak was gone. He recalled the way she had waved her hand

at the cottage the day before and resolved to look for it on the way back and see if he could ascertain who was within the shadow of the curtain at the window. It was so long coming that he had about decided that they had passed it.

His attention was suddenly arrested by a crêpe on a door and drawn blinds, indicating that some soul had answered the final summons. At the same instant he happened to look toward the Conductoreen on the platform. He saw her turning to glance back at the cottage. The bus seemed to slow down almost imperceptibly as they passed. Her handkerchief went to her eyes; he was sure that she brushed away a tear.

This, then, was the cottage in which she centered her attention. His curiosity was still more intense. He longed to say a word of sympathy, but, although he tried to frame something to mutter as she should help him down from the bus at the Black Watch, he could not think of anything appropriate. They were at his corner before any words had framed themselves in his mind. When she helped him down with a suspicion of added tenderness, he strove to mutter "Sorry," but even that trite and useful word stuck to his tongue. He did succeed in grasping her hand with the proffered cane, to give it a sympathetic squeeze, which brought a faint, sad smile to her pal-

lid lips, and caused a rim of tears to spring to her blue eyes. She blinked them away quickly with the long lashes.

There was a large crowd waiting for the bus, which caused considerable delay in loading. The motorman, therefore, took advantage of the wait, and climbed down to adjust something beneath the hood of the motor.

The Doughboy hobbled up to him to ask the question point blank—

"Who's dead in that cottage back aways?"

"Dead? Oh, aye, to be sure. That's 'er 'usband," he said, indicating with a tilt of his head the Conductoreen busy on the rear platform. "'E was wounded bad on the Front. 'E used to set at that there window watchin' her pass all day. Now 'e's gone, an' she 'as to carry on today just the same to get the money for 'is buryin'. She'll lay off tomorrow a couple o' trips when they put 'im under."

The adjustment was finished and the motorman turned to climb back to his seat at the wheel. The Doughboy fumbled in his pocket and drew forth a tiny roll of paper money and some silver. He crushed it into the motorman's surprised hand.

"Here," he said, "take this. It ain't much, but it's all I have. It's for her. She needn't know where it comes from."

He turned and hobbled away as rapidly as his

wound would permit, hurrying down the crooked street in the direction of the hospital.

Although he went every day to town, he never again rode on that bus, never again saw his Conductoreen to give her a chance to thank him if she knew. He was not seeking "thanks," when he gave his all to one whom he adored.

V

A "BILLET DOUX"

WEDNESDAY at two of the afternoon found the brown-eyed lad from the Northwest still in the bathroom of his ward at Mildmay Park, rubbing talcum powder over his bronzed skin, smearing his hair with a cheap cosmetic to make it lie down, and sprinkling cheap perfume on his cotton khaki handkerchief, in a vain hope to kill the odor of lysol and other hospital antiseptics which so persistently cling about one who is in any way connected with a hospital.

.This accomplished, he went out into the ward to coax the Sister in charge to tie his red necktie. Over its knot he slipped a leaden ring which he had laboriously pounded out of a "dog-tag" which he had found abandoned in a "delousing" station back of the lines in France.

His bright hospital blues he had carefully pressed the night before with a brick which he had heated on the tiny coal-stove in the service kitchen of the ward. The result had been quite satisfactory. His suit fitted really well, for the kindly Sister had taken

a pleat or two in the back, which had given the coat something of the effect of a civilian form-fitting coat. The trousers were too long, but he had remedied this by turning the bottoms and pressing them into neat cuffs.

When his toilet was complete he looked quite irresistible, and the Sister could not refrain from giving him a friendly pat on the shoulder, speaking a word of compliment which made the blood course to his forehead. Anything but professional conversation was strictly against regulations, and, though some may have violated the rule, this Sister, though she always treated the boys with the utmost consideration and thoughtfulness, was very careful not to permit them to enter into any light bantering. She found that it interfered with the discipline which it is so difficult, at best, to enforce in a ward filled with boys scarcely out of their teens, some very ill and others limping about. They are filled with effervescing animal spirits, which constantly threaten to overflow, much to the annoyance of those responsible for the enforcement of certain rules and regulations of the ward which are conspicuously pasted on the inner side of the entrance door.

When the final touch was completed and a little more cheap cologne shaken about himself, our hero of the Argonne tilted his over-seas cap at the most fetching angle to break a fair girl's heart, took his

cane, and with a cheery wave at the kindly Sister, called,

"Olive Oil," to which salutation she replied sedately, "Good-bye. Have a good time, but be sure to be back for the nine o'clock check!"

He grinned broadly and winked his eye in a grotesque manner not intended to be disrespectful and went out, leaving the Sister laughing merrily.

He hobbled the long length of the covered wooden walk which connected the wards and passed through the length of the Receiving Ward to glance at the Register of Patients to see if among the latest arrivals were any lads of his own Company. If so, he would look them up in the evening and hear the latest gossip of the Company and his pals.

This accomplished, he started across the driveway for the gate. There a motley assembly of patients able to be pushed about in wheel-chairs, or hobble on crutches, arrayed in bathrobes of all materials and every shade of the rainbow, were looking enviously at the more convalescent lads who were able to sally forth into that great world which lay without the brick encircling walls of the hospital.

The boys were always wishing to go into the park opposite. "For a little air," they would tell their Ward Surgeon. Although the hospital grounds were several times larger than the tiny park, and had a

rarer collection of trees, shrubs, and flowers, it never seemed to interest them to walk about the beautiful flower-bordered gravel paths of the hospital grounds. Perhaps, because the fair demoiselles were not on that side of the wall!

He passed a few words of banter with his mates, joshed with the old Porter at the lodge-gate, who chaffed him about being so carefully gotten up to-day, and passed through the narrow iron gate set in the high brick wall into the street.

School was just letting out; the children were running wildly playing tag, marbles, rolling hoops, or just gazing at the Sammies. A half-dozen of them drew up abreast at the curb and saluted the Dough-boy as he approached. He fumbled in his pocket, found a few stray coppers, and threw them toward them. They scrambled wildly, causing him to laugh heartily. Then they fell upon him, grabbing his hands, his coat-tails, and the smaller of them a trouser-leg. Thus impeded in his progress, he made his way slowly up the street. After two blocks he shook himself loose from his admirers, who ran back to welcome other Sammies.

He stopped and straightened his disarranged clothing, and took a deep breath. Then he drew forth from his pocket a crumpled, soiled note, and read it for the hundredth time.

Dear Sammy,—

We are pleased to see you here, but sorry you are wounded. We hope you will soon be better and able to get back to "blighty." We like your sunny smile. Hope you may always be happy. Come on Wednesday at five, if you can, and have tea.

Hoping to see you then, believe me,

Lovingly yours,

No. 82 Rosemary Gardens.

Gracie Jessup.

On Monday, while walking along one of the narrow, winding streets, flanked by endless rows of two-story, red brick houses, all with low brick wall and hedge before its tiny garden of flowers, a little boy had run out from one of the houses across the way and shoved the folded note into his hand. He had looked in the direction of the house from which the child had come, and had caught a glimpse, in an upper window, of a pretty English girl, smiling and nodding at him frantically and pantomiming that the note was meant for him. He had grinned, waved back, read it, and then signalled an assent. The anxious face vanished in the folds of the lace curtains.

He had sung and whistled all the way back to the hospital and, since then, had fairly counted the moments in impatience for the arrival of Wednesday and five o'clock. At last it was here. In a few more minutes he would be at *Number 82* Rosemary Gardens, and would meet that charming Gracie who had

singled him out for the special bestowal of her largess in form of "tea."

He did not have to ask directions to Rosemary Gardens, for he had a perfect picture of the spot. Indeed, he had twice since walked through that crooked street, located No. 82, and had hoped each time to see Gracie perched by her window, but his hopes had been disappointed. He had not seen her since that one fleeting glimpse as she leaned breathlessly forward in the upper window, anxious to make certain that little brother—for so he supposed the child must be—should give the note to that particular, good-looking wounded soldier.

He reached No. 82 at length. Opening its iron gate, he walked as bravely as he might, although his heart was beating wildly, and struck the door soundly with the old brass-knocker adorning it. The first rap brought no response, so, after a wait of sufficient time, he again smote the knocker, and this time harder. It brought almost instant response; the door opened.

It was Gracie herself. But, oh, what a disappointment! She was not so young as he had fancied her; her smile was not so piquant seen at near range as when viewed across the width of a street. Her complexion was all artificial and he felt sure that the curls were not all her own, either. He conjectured as to her age, but, with a slight frown, which

the alert Gracie noticed at once, and answered with raised, questioning eyebrows, he decided to give up guessing and to make the best of a bad situation.

She invited him into the tiny parlor where a table was already laid in the small bay window. As there were four places arranged at it, he knew that he and Gracie were not to feast alone. Involuntarily he gave a sigh of relief, for the anticipation of dining alone with his hostess did not particularly appeal to him, disappointed as he was in the romance he had been weaving about the writer of the "billet doux."

She motioned him to a roomy, all-over upholstered chair with much-weakened springs, excused herself, and left him alone for a moment.

He gazed about and appraised the faded old wallpaper, the cheap lace curtains, the worn Brussels carpet, the crayons of the family in gaudy gilt frames, a few post-card portraits of Tommies standing on the mantel above the tiny grate in which burned a handful of coals—meaning charcoal—and amid which nestled a singing kettle.

Before he could observe more details, Gracie returned, leading a fat little woman with an embarrassed grin on her broad features. She was half-concealing her bare arms in a capacious apron. But she brought forth a red, rough hand to give him "the glad hand" of welcome with a firmness and strength that made him wince, muscular as he was.

This was Gracie's Mother, it seemed. She was overflowing with a wealth of compliments and congratulations upon her daughter's having secured a wounded Sammy for tea. She apologized for their lateness on plea that "Pater" had not come in yet. He was a stretcher-bearer at the Waterloo Station, and had had to go to meet a special convoy that had arrived at noontime from France. It was an unusual hour for a convoy, but they were anticipating a big drive on the front and the hospitals "over there" were evacuating rapidly to have beds ready for the freshly wounded.

Without waiting longer, they sat down to the tea-table. It was neatly spread, and had an abundance of thinly sliced war-bread, the eternal marmalade—but strawberry instead of the orange which he detested, and of which he got a superfluity—some smoked herring, a few slices of bologna, some sawdust-like cake—but a genuine luxury at that, in England in wartimes. There was really good tea, and, although not as fond of tea as his English cousins, especially when there was neither cream nor sugar to help remove its somewhat bitter taste, still it was acceptable.

He sat quite dumb and could not think of anything to say. His hostess talked vivaciously about London, Mildmay Park in particular, asked if he liked that section of town, commented that it was not

really a first-class neighborhood any more, explained that they lived there because the rents were lower than in other parts, that their neighbors were respectable working-people, that war-time prices were high—an endless stream of words, which did not in the least interest him. He ate with an appetite which greatly pleased his hostesses and they forced more and more upon him, until he felt ashamed to be stuffing so. This was the first home that he had entered in weary months and he was enjoying it to the limit.

Before they had quite finished, an ambulance slowed up at the door, and Gracie cried,

"There's Pater now!" and rushed to the door to let him in.

He came in wearing the dark blue uniform of the Ambulance Column, a man of lean physique, who had been too old to go to the front, but had been doing his bit with that wonderful London Ambulance Column, so splendidly organized and so efficiently managed.

His greeting was as cordial as had been that of his wife and daughter. Laying aside his great-coat, he seated himself at the table and launched into the business of tea-time.

After tea they sat about chatting. The Dough-boy found his tongue unloosening in this congenial atmosphere, and he told them stories of America—

of New York, and of the Great Northwest with its forests and streams and snow-capped mountains. He told them that no one any longer hunted buffaloes on the prairies, nor found Indians walking the streets of the cities wrapped in red blankets, although sometimes one did see civilized Indians so arrayed squatting about Western railway depots. They were so dressed for picturesque effect and were selling Indian souvenirs of pottery, bows and arrows, and Navajo rugs woven in the factories of Philadelphia.

It gradually turned to twilight—such a beautiful, pinky twilight as England alone knows. In its deepening shade, Gracie took on a softer look and seemed to grow more beautiful. He had discovered a charm about her when she talked and smiled that quite made him forget his first unpleasant impression as she opened the door. It was a disappointment of youth, rather than anything else. He had expected a girl of sixteen or seventeen and had found a woman—well, he had not yet determined of just how many years! He decided, however, that she wasn't, after all, so many years older than himself, but that the deprivations of wartime, its hard work, the cares, the worries entailed upon her, as upon all women of the warring countries, had made her face mature before its time. She had confided that she had driven an ambulance during those early days of struggle on the Belgian frontier until the "flu took her down,"

and that her hair had been bobbed after that, was only now beginning to lengthen, and was now at quite an unmanageable length. She chatted of these things quite impersonally and in a matter-of-fact way, not as though she knew that he was disappointed in her and was trying to offer an apology.

He finally mustered his courage and suggested that he and Gracie should go to a nearby picture-show. This seemed to be for what she had been waiting. With a cry of pleasure she arose promptly, excused herself, rushed off for a hat and wrap. She came back at length, a little fresh powder on her nose, perhaps a dash more of rouge, for it was darker without, and she could wear more and not be too conspicuous. On her head was a nifty little hat, with the prettiest of draped grey veils. She had wound a grey veil of some sort of thin stuff about her neck, and its long ends fell about her, partially enveloping her bare arms. A bright pink rose was thrust in the folds of her veil at the neck. She made a most bewitching picture in the firelight of the little room and he felt rather proud of his partner in pleasure.

She kissed her parents affectionately. He shook their hands awkwardly and more awkwardly thanked them for their hospitality, vowing that he would come again before they had had time to issue the in-

vation! Their genial smiles, however, quite covered the *faux pas*.

He and Gracie issued forth from the doorway, the envious eyes of neighborhood girls resting upon them, and made their way along the street, stepping cautiously amid the many tiny children at play upon the sidewalks.

"The Perils of Pauline" happened to be showing on Wednesdays, and Gracie had been most anxious to see the continuation of its hair-raising episodes. The longer picture was an English one, not too well taken, and quite foggy because of unfavorable climatic conditions under which it was photographed. There was an old one-reel of Charlie Chaplin, some topical pictures of current events and a Bud Fisher cartoon of "Mutt and Jeff." It was a long evening's entertainment and he would have found it quite a bore, but for the presence of Gracie, who removed her hat, and snuggled as close to him as the "bouncer" would permit in that particular theater.

She suggested that he smoke and was not at all hesitant to accept a cigarette which he proffered her from the near-gold case which he had recently acquired in a raffle held by one of the patients in his ward. They smoked cigarettes, one between them, at last, passing it from lip to lip; they held hands, giggled and tittered, were duly reproved by glances

and semi-voce whispers of some females long past the springtime of youth who were "just a trifle catty," as Gracie expressed it.

The evening drew to a close, and they gladly came to the cool, fresh air of the world without, gaily sauntering along the streets toward No. 82 Rosemary Gardens.

At her gate they paused. He had by this time forgotten his disappointment. With both hands he held those of Gracie, finally drew her toward him, and implanted a genuine, impetuous kiss of youth upon her tinted lips. She laughed the merriest little laugh, which seemed to gurgle up from some deep well of sorrow, away down in the bottom of her heart. As she seemed to like it, he repeated the act, and finally put both arms about her and brazenly hugged her in a great, overgrown, boyish way that, if not in the best of taste, was sincere. Gracie liked it. The tears sprang to her eyes—tears of happiness, though.

She had memories of days before the War when another had held her so, another who had found a resting-place in "the fields where the poppies blow." But she knew that he would not mind if he could see her now. She somehow felt that he would feel that it was all right, and that she had merited this little moment of pleasure in a world of sorrow and suffering. So she gave herself to the enjoyment of

its intoxication and the clock ticked on. Finally she heard its midnight chime, awoke with a startled realization of time and the hour, and nervously told him. He, too, was surprised, grinned sheepishly, again pressed her to him, kissed her long and tenderly, and said, "Good Night," promising to come again—and soon!

Thus they parted, she entering her house, he going gaily toward the hospital, whistling a merry tune—and an English one, too!

I'm coming back to you, my Hulla Lou,
Beside the sea at Waikiki you'll play for me,
And once again you'll sway my heart your way,
With your yaa-ka hula hickey dula tune.

Of course he had been checked out and would be called to account in the morning. This did not disturb the joy of the hour. He found a corner of the high wall where someone had earlier in the evening placed a piece of box. By its aid and with the crook of his cane, he succeeded in mounting its top and slipped down into the darkness of the bushes, barely missing an Officer and giggling Nurse seated there spooning. He lay a moment in the shadows waiting the Guard to pass the spot. Then he slid along in the shadow of the Nurses' Quarters, passed the dormitories of the enlisted men, and at last came to the back of his own ward.

He knew that the Nurse must have finished her midnight supper, but he hoped that she had lingered to chat and had not yet returned. He quietly slipped in at the rear door—thoughtfully unlatched for him by the Buddy in the next bed, after the Nurse had gone to supper. He found a bathrobe, also, left on the rear step by this same Buddy of his. Removing his shoes, he slipped into the bathrobe, and tiptoed down the sleeping ward. The Orderly was snoring under the light at the table, a “Mason’s Handbook” which he had been perusing lying open on his lap.

He leaped into bed, clothes and all, and for several minutes lay quite quiet lest some tittle-tattler were awake and observant of his surreptitious entrance. As no one moved and the breathing and snores came with clocklike regularity, he sat up in bed and rapidly undressed himself, partially shielded by the sheets. Just as he finished, the Nurse returned, and, awaking the Orderly, told him that it was time for his supper. For some reason she followed the Orderly into the corridor and to the door, speaking of milk or soup, or something of that nature, which she wanted him to bring back when he returned.

This was his chance. He leaped quietly from his bed, dashed to the table, and quickly checked himself present, and, rushing back to his bed, he hopped in and pulled the covers over his ears. When the Nurse

returned, he was snoring loudly. She glanced at her chart, frowned in perplexity at something she noticed there, then, searchlight in hand, shielding its rays with her left palm, she made a tour of the ward to see how many beds were still vacant.

When she arrived at our Doughboy's, she stopped in surprise, came near, and bent over him to make certain that it really was he who was there, and not another patient trying to fool her. She stood perplexed. Finally she shook her head and retired to her table, and examined the checklist. She could not make it out.

At length she sighed as if she had determined to let the matter stand as it was, took up the knitting that she was engaged on and soon was intent on her work. The only sounds that broke the quietness of the night when there was no light barrage, and no whirring airplanes scouting the air for possible "Boches," were the click of her needle and the regular snores of sleeping Doughboys, in which chorus our hero was one of the loudest performers.

VI

THE "V. A. D."

HE met her first on Thursday afternoon at Eagle Hut, where she waited tables. He had gone there with about fifty of the wounded boys from Mildmay, who were guests of the Y. M. C. A.

That afternoon the entertainment was furnished by a wonderful Jazz Quartette of real Southern Darkies, who each Thursday gave their services for two hours to amuse the boys from home. A space was cleared before the stage and dancing was in order, but with male partners only. This was how he came to become acquainted with her. She stood on the steps that led down from the writing-room, looking oh, so wistfully, at the dancing couples. The soldiers of all allied nations were swaying together in a brotherly commingling of happy irresponsibility that was thrilling. Most graceful of all the swaying couples were the many sets of slender young sailors from the American battleships at Portsmouth who were up to London on furlough. Then a gracious lady offered a ten-shilling note for the best dancing couple and he had screwed up his

courage to ask her to dance with him, wounded though he was. She had smiled a trifle sadly and said,

"The policy of Eagle Hut is against our dancing with the men. Only male couples may compete."

He looked abashed and tried to mumble that he had been so recently in London that he did not know the style. She laughed and said,

"Oh, that is certainly excusable. So many of the boys think it strange that we are not allowed to dance with them, but it would interfere with our business. We are here to work, after all, you know. But on Saturday night, if you can come down, I should be pleased to be your partner in the Frolic with which we close the evening. It isn't dancing, but it is very much like it."

He thanked her and said that he would try to come then.

They stood and watched the competitive dancers as they were gradually eliminated by the judges. The balance now was between a Canadian and an American soldier waltzing together, and two American sailors. The soldiers finally missed a step, and were ruled out of the competition. The prize was awarded amid much applause to the Jackies, who, blushing like schoolgirls, accepted it, and made an awkward bow, which caused more merriment.

She commented, "A sailor is always one of the

winners. I think it must be that they are accustomed to dancing together on shipboard."

He acquiesced, and would have said more, but she was called away by the manager to wait on her tables.

He strolled about awhile, and finally decided to sample the delicious home-made pancakes which a really-to-goodness American lady was frying on a griddle in one part of the dining-hall. They were six-pence for three, with a tiny pot of much-watered Vermont maple-syrup. He stood in line for a long time to buy a ticket from the cashier and again to get the cakes. His friend of the afternoon came to him and helped him to a table, for he was inconvenienced in trying to carry the plate and use his cane. This gave him an opportunity for further conversation, and he succeeded in learning that he might be allowed to take her somewhere on Wednesday evening. She blushed and, after a moment of hesitation, accepted. She agreed to meet him "across the street, around the corner from the Aldwych—the Australian Y. M. C. A. opposite."

"The management object to girls loitering about the Hut," she explained.

There was no more opportunity for conversation that afternoon, for the supper crowd was pouring in, and she was exceedingly busy. He had to be back at the hospital tonight at seven o'clock. It

was now six and he knew that he should have difficulty in finding a seat in bus No. 39 at Trafalgar Square. So he arose, pushed his way through the crowd of soldiers and sailors, and came out upon the Strand. He hurried as rapidly as his game leg would allow toward the Nelson Monument.

He was fortunate in getting a bus at once. People made way for him with a sort of reverential deference because of his wound. London showed rare courtesy to all wounded soldiers. To wear a suit of hospital "blues" assured one of the utmost consideration on every hand.

The ride back through the early evening with its gilding clouds was exhilarating, and he enjoyed every moment. An aeroplane was flying around a lazily floating dirigible, like a gnat annoying an elephant. All the passengers were interested and watched until buildings shut them from view as the bus bowled along across Oxford Circle. He was interested watching the crowds at the corners running after over-crowded busses. He was always amazed at the facility and agility of the London girls hopping on and off the rear of rapidly moving busses. The shops along Tottenham Court Road, too, always had such attractive window displays, which he enjoyed seeing. He really was acquiring a sort of culture which travel and sight-seeing give one, although he was not at all aware of the fact.

They passed gloomy Holloway Castle behind its high walls, where were once imprisoned the over-zealous Suffragettes. It was suggestive of much romance with its turrets of medieval architecture. After another ten minutes, they had arrived at the Black Watch, and he was clambering down, hurrying toward the hospital gates.

He arrived in his ward with five minutes to spare, and exceedingly tired from having stood and walked more than ordinarily. His wound, although permitting him to get around with considerable freedom, was still unhealed. His breath, too, was somewhat short from the phosgene gas which he had inhaled when, wounded, he lay so many hours in a shell-hole awaiting succor by the Red Cross. He did not go to the Movies that night, therefore, but undressed, took a hot bath, went to bed, and was soon sleeping soundly.

At Saturday night's Frolic in Eagle Hut, they marched to the music of the piano, sang popular songs, played drop the handkerchief, Nantucket, Stage Coach, and all the good old-fashioned games, and became very well-acquainted—that is, the Doughboy and his V. A. D.

He insisted on escorting her home afterward, although the hour was late. It was not until then that he learned that she lived in the vicinity of Mildmay

and took the same No. 39 bus. So fortune smiled upon him.

They climbed to the top, fortunate in securing the front row of seats. Nothing would interrupt their view nor interfere with their spooning on the way back. The night was raw and chilly, and the moon shone fitfully through the misty clouds. The barrage was up when they came out of Eagle Hut and the first warning of approach of hostile planes had been 'phoned. Since no second warning had come, they felt assured that the bombing Boche planes had been turned back. Usually there was a second warning when the planes reached the English Coast, so they were in perplexity and the home-farers had this as a topic for speculation. Several scout-planes were dipping and diving in the air like beautiful silver fish or Annette Kellermans at play in water. The planes would vanish behind the floating clouds, shoot suddenly forth, and glide down a shaft of light as if it were a toboggan-slide. Other searchlights would concentrate their rays on the machines, and the daring aviators would do figure eights, loop the loop more times than one could count from the jolting top of a bus. Then they would right themselves, skim along the edge of an approaching cloud, and vanish suddenly in its depths, to reappear a moment later, glittering with a beautiful silver iridescence that was

exquisite to behold. Halfway home the barrage went down, and they heard exclamations of relief on all sides. Now people could retire to their beds and sleep peacefully, quite certain that no cruel bomb would be dropped to do its fiendish work of brutal murder.

She sighed and cuddled closer to her escort, burying her face in the collar of his great-coat. He clasped her closer in his arms. For a while both were silent, gazing upward at the moon shining clear in the deep azure sky, rivalled by no artificial rays of man. The world seemed for the time being at peace. But a wind arose after a little, and on its current was wafted the slightest echo of cannonading on the distant war-front. It was just barely audible. Only those with keen ears, attentive for such sound, would detect it and associate it with those great guns eighty miles away across the Channel.

It served to make one realize that although London just now seemed at peace, a world at War was frothing in fury from blood-lust just without its door, ready to rush in and tear its quiet work-a-day world into shreds. She shuddered and drew closer as if in pain. No words passed between them. He was thinking of his pals in the Company over there in Flanders, wondering if the booming was sweeping any more of the gallant little band of heroes to

their death. She was listening, too, thinking of that lonely grave where the one she had loved and for whom she wore a mourning band with gold star on her arm lay sleeping the last sleep, beneath a wilderness of red poppies which suggested the pool of blood in which he fell.

He felt her hair brushing his cheek. He nestled his cheek deeper in its depth. There was a faint aroma of rose-geranium. His Mother had used that, too, and it made him wistful with visions of home. A deep tenderness stole into his heart, and with a reverent touch he lightly pressed his lips to the forehead of the sweet innocence nestling there on his breast. An elderly couple returning from some form of work, noticed it, touched their hands in the darkness of the bus-top, and smiled tenderly. It was so different, this couple, from the more jocose, blatantly flirtatious couples who usually filled the top at this hour of the night.

They rode along in silence. Only a block from her corner did she seem to realize where she was, and sat up with a start as if awakened from a deep revery. Her eyes had a far-away expression; she seemed oblivious to her surroundings. She arose and made her way toward the back of the bus just in time to force down the round plunger which rang a bell announcing that some one on top wished to

alight. He followed her as rapidly as he might, scrambled down the narrow, steep staircase, and stumbled off into the darkness of the street.

She took his arm and guided him down one of the narrow, crooked streets of the neighborhood. At her door they paused. She reached beneath the worn doormat and found the key. A candle was burning on the marble-topped hallstand as he unlocked the door. She turned to him and for the first time in half an hour spoke.

"Thank you so much for a pleasant evening and seeing me home," she said. "I fear I did not prove a very interesting companion. The echo of those guns stirred memories and my heart was just too full to speak."

"I felt the same," he answered.

She gave him her hand and they clasped in a bond of mutual comprehension.

"Good-night."

"May I not see you on your night off?" he queried as she turned to close the door.

"Surely. We had agreed on that before, hadn't we?"

"I wanted to make sure."

"Why not meet me here?" she suggested. "Isn't it more convenient than at the Aldwych, as we had first planned?"

"Right-o," he answered, imitating the Englishman's catchword.

"About seven. I am off at six. Is that too early for you?"

"Suits me."

"Very well, then. I shall be looking for you at seven on Wednesday."

"Good-bye-ee," and he gave her hand a final clasp. He tried to kiss her, but she shook her head, and turned aside her face.

"Don't spoil an otherwise perfect night that way at the end," she said simply. He respected her feelings and turned toward the gate.

"Goodnight," she cried after him. He waved his hand at her and said,

"Goodnight."

The door closed behind her and he stumbled silently and thoughtfully along the stone pavement. Here was a girl who had given him a sort of spiritual uplift, and he wondered just what there had been about her to thrill him that way. She had nestled as closely as the others; he had felt the touch and perfume of her hair; the moon had shone as brightly; and yet, although the conditions had seemed the same, he had felt toward this woman a tenderness and a deference which he had not felt in his contact with so many other girls of this part of London.

It puzzled him. She had been as gay as the rest at the Frolic, and yet— What was this mysterious difference which separated her from the multitude which pressed about the gates of Mildmay Park and tempted one only to excesses?

He had not solved the riddle when he reached the hospital. He went boldly in tonight for he had a midnight pass and did not have to resort to the subterfuge of climbing the brickwall and sneaking in at the rear door of the ward.

His ward was snoring unmusically as he entered, and the Sister looked up from her chair, smiled, placed her finger on her lips, indicating to him to be as silent as possible in retiring. He was still under the influence of the girl whom he had just left, and he tiptoed softly about and, with scarcely any noise, climbed into his bed.

As a reward, the Sister after a few moments brought him a cup of hot soup which she carried nightly from the mess-hall to give to such patients as seemed to need a little extra stimulation during the long, wakeful hours of the night. He drank it thankfully, managing to squeeze her hand in appreciation as she handed him the cup. She smiled, quietly vanished down the length of the dark ward, and resumed her work of checking charts at the table beneath the low glow of the green-shaded lamp.

He awoke the next morning to the tune of "Mis-

souri Waltz" on the ward phonograph. He turned over and tried to go to sleep again, but the Nurse thrust a thermometer into his mouth, began taking his pulse, and otherwise persisted in annoying him. A few minutes later the Orderly was assuring him that he had to get up and wash. So he rolled out of bed and made his way in his bathrobe to the lavatory, where he stood in line, Red Cross ditty-bag on his arm, to get a "lick and a promise," as he termed it. He would get a shave and a hot bath later in the day when the place was less crowded.

Breakfast was the usual thing—oatmeal husks and watered milk, too hard toast, "drippings" in lieu of butter, bacon and eggs, coffee minus sugar and milk, and a bunch of luscious hot-house grapes. Some kind American lady furnished this hospital with fresh fruit for the patients daily, as her contribution toward Red Cross work. It wasn't a bad breakfast for wartime, by any means, but when one has eaten the same breakfast for a month, any breakfast is distasteful, no matter what it consists of.

He laid around all morning. He tried to write some letters, but the persistent memory of the girl of last night was upon him. He could not shake off that wonderful impression of "sanctity," as he now termed it, which hovered about her. It had impressed him wonderfully at the time and he had dreamed of angels and a Paradise not so very unlike

Washington's meadows, all night. The dream was pleasant, the girl had been a happy relief from the other type that he had come in contact with, but it all made him homesick. It reminded him of the other little girl whose portrait he wore in the back of his watch—or did wear when he had a gold watch. The thought of the loss of that portrait annoyed him more than the loss of the watch. He had a snapshot which she had mailed him once since he came over, but he did not consider it as good a likeness.

Finally at eleven o'clock he decided to write the "V. A. D." a note. So he hobbled up to the desk and got some Red Cross paper and envelope from the Chief Nurse in charge. With her permission he sat down at one end of the table and tried to frame the nicest kind of a letter.

He frowned and bit the end of his fountain-pen, forgetful that it was not a pencil, until he heard it cracking. He stopped biting the pen and looked thoughtfully at its damaged end. Then he looked up and saw the Nurse staring at him. It annoyed him. She smiled in a quizzical way and said,

"Can I help you in any way?"

"Yes," he said. "What is a 'V. A. D.'?"

The Nurse laughed heartily.

"A 'V. A. D.'?" she said. "What makes you ask that?"

"Oh, nothing. I just wanted to know. You don't

have to tell me if you don't want to," he snapped back.

The Sister frowned, ever so slightly, and said,

"I believe that it stands for Volunteer Aid Department. They are the women you see around here in light blue dresses. They serve for nothing, or very little aside from board and clothing—and some do not get that even."

"Oh," he said.

"It is no use flirting with any of them. Their Captain is a major-domo and will not countenance any of the patients or personnel flirting with them or asking them out. Why, only last week she sent home two girls whom she found climbing over the wall after being to a party or something, when she supposed that they were in their beds!"

"I am not interested in any of them," he replied, and began to make marks on the writing-paper.

Duty of some sort called the Nurse away from the table and he breathed a sigh of relief. He could not frame a letter with her sitting there watching him—and this was an important letter.

"Dear V. A. D.," it began. There he stopped and considered. Then he wrote on. "I do not feel as well after being up last night, and the Lieutenant in charge of my ward thinks I ought not to stay out late again, and so I am sorry to have to write and tell you that I shall not be able to keep that ap-

pointment for Wednesday night. I am sorry. Perhaps some other time I shall be better and can take you out then." He had no such intention, for she awakened too many memories of home, and he did not care to think too strongly of there when so many thousands of miles of ocean and land lay between him and home.

He read the letter over carefully several times. Then he hastily scrawled, "Your sincere friend," and signed his name.

After fumbling in an overcrowded wallet, he found her name and address, and addressed the letter, following her name with the big initials, "V. A. D." He thrust the letter into his pocket hastily as the Sister returned to the table and went back to his bed to read "Saucy Stories" and kill time until it was two o'clock and he could go out again.

He did not place the letter in the receptacle at the end of the ward to be censored by the Officer in charge. Oh, no, he did not want everyone prying into his affairs of the heart! He kept it safely in his pocket and, when afternoon came and he left the hospital, he mailed his letter in an oval-shaped, red, pillar-box, a few blocks away from the hospital.

He felt just a twinge of regret as the letter dropped from sight and he let the metal flap drop down with a bang.

"She was such a nice girl," he reflected, "but then

she did remind him of home, and of that other girl, and— Oh, well, he was in the army now, and it was a great life if you don't weaken!"

And so he hobbled up the street on other ventures bent, humming the air—

When Irish eyes are smiling,
Sure it's like a morn in Spring.
In the lilt of Irish laughter
You can hear the angels sing.
When Irish hearts are happy
All the world seems bright and gay,
And when Irish eyes are smiling,
Sure they steal your heart away.

Then it dawned on him that perhaps she was Irish, and that therein lay the reason for the strange fascination that she had for him. He regretted now that he had posted that letter, but it was too late, and so he hobbled cheerily along, still humming,

When Irish eyes are smiling,
Sure they steal your heart away.

VII

BRITANNIA HALL

ON Wednesday night the enlisted personnel—or a certain portion of them who were inordinately fond of jazz-dancing with English girls—arranged a dance at Britannia Hall, not far from the hospitals at Mildmay Park.

The Jazz Orchestra formed from the members of the Hospital Unit was to provide the music. Hospital trucks were to convey those wishing to go. Thus it was that the Doughboy did not visit his Madonna, but went instead to the dance—the first one that he had attended since he had left the Cantonment, away off there in the Northwest, so long ago.

The trucks were packed with standing soldiers and the ride was rough and jolting, but to one who had travelled over half of France in box-cars, labelled "Eight horses or twenty men," it was almost luxurious. Then there was the excitement of waving at pretty girls as they ~~passed them~~, and openly and brazenly flirting with the more susceptible. Invitations to the dance were shouted at random and accepted just as indiscriminately by certain types of

women parading the streets. Youth is always reckless and free from care.

So they bowled merrily along over the rough cobble-stones, whirled around corners, clutching each other wildly in vain effort to retain their balance against the forces of gravity, and at length, with a jerk that sent them all tumbling frantically, drew up abruptly before the Hall.

With wild scrambling and yelling like boarding-school boys released for a Summer vacation, the merry soldiers piled off and scrambled up the long, steep staircase.

Some had grabbed pretty girls who crowded the sidewalks to see the soldiers arrive. Laughing and shouting, singing snatches of song, they all made their way into the dance hall.

The hall had been attractively decorated by girls of the neighborhood. The colors of the Allies blended in artistic harmony. The flag of our own United States, flanked by those of England and France, had the place of honor. It thrilled one to see that America had taken her place amid the great nations of the world, a recognized factor and power.

The Jazz Band arrived a few minutes later and, escorted by myriads of spritely girls, made a triumphant entry and processional across the waxen, slippery floor, to a raised dais at the far end of the hall. The escorting females stood around the plat-

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form gazing affectionately upon their stalwart beaux, who, winking, grinning, joshing with them, tuned their instruments and prepared to render the first dance of the evening.

Amid wild skirmishing, the boys in khaki and the boys in blue grabbed their sweethearts, who were thronging forth from the dressing-room, and, as the first strains of "Are You From Dixie" broke forth, the floor began to seethe with effervescing youth and became a kaleidoscope of gay color. Youthful, happy laughter arose above the music, and at times threatened to drown its sound, as some hapless couple stumbled awkwardly through the bewildering steps, and all but fell on the over-slippery floor. It was a gay, good-natured crowd, which suggested the balls of the Quartier Latin and the wild student revels that hold forth there. There was nothing vicious, just a good fellowship of youth in its Maytime at play.

As the evening wore on, the crowd became more boisterous, however, and entered into the dancing with wild abandon. Gay shouts of revelry rent the air and disturbed the neighborhood, which was trying to sleep after a weary day. With careless unconcern the band played on, the youth revolving and twining and twisting in the mazes of all the latest jazz-dances. At length the police felt it their bounden duty to step in and inform the merry party that

midnight had sounded and that it was quite time that the revelry should come to a close.

That was the unfortunate beginning of the end of an otherwise perfect evening. The band only laughed at the guardians of the law, and, grinning broadly, went straight ahead, playing more loudly and with more wild abandon. The banjo artist scrambled upon one end of the piano and sat there strumming his banjo. The drummer climbed upon a table and other musicians, following their lead, sat upon the backs of their chairs. One luckless individual lost his balance and fell backward with a tremendous thud which caused gales of laughter and loud applause and cries of "Encore!" from the gallery—or some other remote part of the house.

Then it was that the Officers took the law unto themselves, and peremptorily ordered the lights lowered. The lad obeying went beyond the mandate, and turned out all the lights. There were piercing shrieks and screams from the girls, suppressed oaths among the men, shoving, scuffling and the sound of thin garments tearing in the wild stampede. Amid all this excitement, the band played on, and the two officers were seized by strong hands, hustled through the crowd to the exit, and catapulted down the long staircase into the dark and uninviting street. The lights were turned up and the dancing resumed.

The two "Bobbies" picked up their injured dig-

nity, found that not a shred was missing, although it was terribly awry, smoothed it out, and, clubs in hand, started the difficult ascent of the steep, barricaded staircase. They did not mount halfway before a shower of missiles rained down upon their lofty heads. They retreated, but not without some show of injured majesty. On the sidewalk they held a consultation of war; after due and solemn deliberation, they sounded shrill blasts upon their whistles and then proceeded to kick their heels on the unfriendly stones of the pavement, nursing the fumes of their wrath until their brothers of the law should arrive with reinforcements to storm the citadel of misrule.

They came at length. Another war-council ensued and strategical tactics were worked out. After a few moments spent in a sort of rehearsal behind the lines of the movements planned, they parted, and each went to the spot from which he was to make his attack upon the castle of mirth, which still wildly revelled as if there was no such thing as law and order, or a midnight closing law.

But the forced gayety was short-lived, for the officers of the law made a sortie from half-a-dozen spots at once, this time with more success. They grabbed the nearest couples by the neck, and rushed them forcefully and undignifiedly toward the entrance and down the stairs. The girls were strug-

gling and scrambling wildly, some tearful, others hysterically shouting defiance and urging the men to—

“Stick it out!”

“Don’t let them Bob’s best ye!”

“Shame on ye, there!—ye’re hurtin’ of ’im! Cannot ye see he is a wounded man? Ah, for shame!” and many other cries more varied and some of more picturesque applicatives.

Our luckless Doughboy was caught in the midst of the revel, and, impeded by his lame leg, was unable to move as swiftly as many another. So he was singled out as a victim and hastened doorward. The girl with whom he had been dancing was terrified; she clung frantically to his arm, exhorting the guardian of the law to “release his grasp upon her arm, and let him be!”

But the law was relentless and he was hustled down the staircase along with scores of others, and half slid, half fell its length, the girl hanging to him. Her hat had been pushed off and hung to her falling hair by force of a single hat-pin. She reached up and pulled out the pin. With its sharp end, she jabbed the Bobbie violently in a super-sensitive spot of his anatomy, thus making him release his hold upon the Doughboy and pour forth upon her the vials of his wrath.

“Resistin’ ’is Majesty’s h’Officer, be ye?” he

shrieked, rubbing his punctured anatomy. "But I'll be givin' ye a free ride in the patrol when it comes!" And he grabbed the girl's arm brutally and hustled them both across the sidewalk beneath the light of the sickly gas at the corner.

Neighbors had by this time gathered, late as the hour was, arrayed in sundry mis-matched articles of raiment. They were loudly calling for their daughters and bidding them "come home from the dirty brawl to oncet?" Come they did, crying bitterly, their delicate garments sadly the worse for the affair, their hair tousled and untidy. They were mothered beneath voluminous shawls and sobbed hysterically on capacious bosoms. A few angry parents of the male persuasion, too old to go to war, kept shaking their fists beneath the noses of the soldiers, calling down sundry maledictions upon their careless heads.

Under the yellow gaslight, the Doughboy and his girl clutched each other. She sobbed, the tears wetting his stout shoulder. He comforted her in a boyish way, smoothed her tousled head, and urged her to "brace up."

"They have nothing against us," he whispered. "We did nothing wrong. We were only dancing."

She sobbed on, un comforted by his words.

"They will release us in a moment—they have no charge against us."

Then she blurted out tearfully,—

"Not against you, maybe, but they have it on me. I have been reported as delinquent by the probation officer. She says I am wild and ought to be put away. And my poor Mother depends on me for her support. I am not a bad girl—I'm not really wild,—I don't mean to be. But I just can't resist coming out o' nights to Mildmay Park to talk to the soldiers. She has it in for me, and she is always spying around, flashing that nasty lamp of hers in my face, and nodding her head, and saying, "I've caught you again, my girl!" And now—now— they will send me off—to the workhouse,—and what will me poor Mother be doin', with all the kids to look after, their mouths to feed, their feet to shod?"

He found speech inadequate to answer this flow of rhetoric, so he kept silence, continuing to stroke her hair and pat her cheek.

At length the patrol came and he found himself bundled in with this chance acquaintance of the dance-hall. She sat beside him, her head on his shoulder, his arms clasped about her sobbing frame. Along with half-a-dozen others, all as innocent of wrong-doing as themselves, they were jolted along toward the police station not far from Mildmay itself.

The ride seemed eternal. But it came to an end finally, like all things mundane must. They were

hustled out, marshalled up the steps, and arraigneded before the severe-looking Captain at the desk. He frowned at them, made all the stock grimaces of his profession, and began to enter the charges upon his blotter.

Tearful Mothers forced themselves up the steps striving to enter the police-station, but they were pushed back by the Officer at the door, and the very door itself closed in their anxious, tearful faces. They gathered at the foot of the steps, called down imprecations upon the police and their ways, and shook their angry fists at the guardian of the sacred portal.

The record was made and the Captain deliberated. Then he ordered them removed to cells, whilst their parents were notified. The sobbing, defiant eight were led away. The door was then opened, and the wrathful parents ushered into the sacred presence of his Majesty's henchman.

They aligned themselves tearfully, angrily, sullenly before him, and listened to his lecture upon the care of children, and their duty as parents to keep their girls in off the streets and not to allow them to associate with lawless soldiers, who had no good intentions. You would have thought it had been something very criminal, this innocent dance of youth! Those of small authority are prone to exaggerate

its scope and enlarge trifles into unsurmountable barriers. His comments ended, he informed them that their off-springs should be released to them forthwith if they would undertake to see that they remained off the streets nights and did not have further to do with soldiers. This they were compelled to agree to, although they made secret mental reservations.

So the tearful innocents were brought forth, and, after each had been duly identified and the blotter signed, were released with further warning and adjudication to their tearful Mothers, who led them away into the street and homeward, each scolding or chiding her child as they went.

All were released, then, except our Doughboy and his inamorata. They were lined up before the judicial-looking Captain, who cleared his throat and frowned, and grinned sardonically.

Her mother had been held in the background until now. The Captain turned toward her and said,—

“Can you identify this girl as your daughter, ma’am?”

“Can I identify her?” she fairly shrieked. “Rather! Poor innocent! Poor darlin’!” Then she turned fiercely upon the big-eyed Doughboy from the Northwest. “So you are the black-hearted villain who has been leading her off, are ye? You bloomin’,

bloody bounder! It is trouble enough you have been causing me, with the complaints of that probation officer about her bein' wayward, and a-horderin' o' me to keep her in off'n the streets at night when she needs the breath of the fresh air after a long hard day in the munitions!"

The boy started to expostulate that he had never seen her daughter until tonight when he had chanced upon her at the dance, and had been so unlucky as to have been one-stepping with her when the officers of the law broke in upon them.

It was all in vain. The girl added her affirmation to his words, but, anxious to find some one to blame for her daughter's unhappy plight, the Mother heeded not and continued an abusive torrent of words. It seemed as if they would flow on as endlessly as the proverbial brook; they rattled and purred over her porcelain teeth like a wild mountain torrent in time of a freshet.

The tirade was cut short by the entry of the young Lieutenant from the Doughboy's ward. He had been out to the theater and, on his return, had been told by returning Lotharios of the sorry end of the dancing-party. He had learned that some of the boys were detained at the police-station and would be released only upon the appearance of some Officer to sign for them. So with boyish impetuosity, for he had not yet forgotten his own youthful days and

their innocent, careless-of-consequences escapades, he had come over to rescue the members of his flock.

He paused in astonishment before the fierce words which were being hurled forth by the irate parent. Then he stepped up to the Captain, who immediately recognized him as the Officer who had before now come at the opportune moment. They had a few words together, then the Lieutenant turned to the irate Mother and said,—

“Madame, I am positive that you are making a mistake as to this lad and that what your daughter says is quite true. He is not one of those who frequents the streets hereabouts. His wounds are not yet in a condition to permit that. He was out to-night as a special favor from me; I am certain they speak the truth.”

She was over-awed by the sight of the Officer and perhaps felt a bit of the old coquette she had been in her girlhood, for she dropped him a quaint courtesy, and, softening her tone, began a whining, whimpering apology for her mistake.

The Officer accepted it graciously, overlooking the whine, and said,—

“Take your daughter home. Don’t scold her too much because she went to an innocent dance. She needs that much relaxation in the face of the grim realities of war and its train of misery and hardships.”

The girl turned a grateful face upon him. Then she and her Mother started toward the door. They turned an instant and the woman said,—

"I'm sorry I made a mistake and called you out of your name. If you will come to tea Sunday, me and my daughter will be most happy to entertain you, and try to make amends."

"Thank you," said the Doughboy with a grin.

When he and his Lieutenant reached the sidewalk and were part of the way back to the hospital, the Lieutenant said,—

"Look here, Buddy, I got you out of that scrape but don't go near that girl again. Take my advice, and leave her alone. It isn't safe to fool with girls too close around home."

The lad grinned sheepishly, was about to protest, thought better of it and kept his own counsel. He said simply,

"Aye, aye, sir," and saluted.

Needless to say, he did not go to tea Sunday afternoon at that home.

VIII

A NIGHT AT THE WOODBINE

ON the several occasions when the mild-eyed lad from Washington had ridden to the Northern end of bus-line No. 39, he had observed a rather good-looking theater devoted to vaudeville and moving-pictures. It was called the Woodbine and belonged to a large circuit of such theaters located all over the United Kingdom. He promised himself each time that he would go there, but it had either slipped his mind, or there had been other things to do.

He had had a restless, unhappy Sunday. It had rained all day,—torrents of rain, which precluded all possibility of going far from the hospital. The motion pictures in the evening under the Y. M. C. A. and Red Cross auspices had been decidedly poor. The operator had persisted in running the machine at irregular speeds, either too slow or too fast; the current was weak and projection blurred; and, to cap the climax of bad operation, the operator had mixed up the sequence of the half-a-dozen reels, and had shown the end of the picture first, then the third reel, the first, the fourth, the second and the fifth,

in that confusing order, which had perplexed and annoyed the hospital inmates, and caused booing and considerable disorder, which not even the presence of many Officers and Nurses had served to repress. Indeed, the Officers and Nurses had giggled and laughed aloud at the antics on the screen, and felt in sympathy with the outspoken protests of the youthful spectators.

A rather famous authoress had come to speak. She was not of prepossessing presence, was dowdily attired, and had difficulty in seeing the lines of the poems which she was reading as a portion of the lecture,—a lecture on “Psychological Aspects of Spiritism.” The subject itself was suggestive of the address,—dismal and gloomy, away above the heads of the youthful soldiers who packed the mess-hall anticipating an evening of mirth and happiness to off-set the depressing effect of the dreary day.

The lecturer spoke at great length, in a dull, monotonous tone. Her eye-glasses persisted in slipping from her attenuated nose and would catch in the folds of purple maline which enwrapped her stringy throat and hung loosely down the front of her drab gown. Her voice was feeling the effects of the November fog and she rasped and coughed and wheezed pathetically. Unfortunately, the audience, themselves afflicted with endless pains and maladies, were not in sympathy; one by one they clattered out,

their wooden peg-legs, their canes and crutches, the rumble of their wheel-chairs, added to the uneasiness of the reader, and caused her to fumble and forget the thread of her discourse.

Then a fuse had blown out, and she had given up in hopelessness and sunk in the gloom and disorder that ensued. What became of her after that, no one about the hospital seemed to know. She just vanished, as it were, into the spiritual realms of her discourse. Albeit, she never was seen there afterward and no one has since heard of her attempting to address another audience of American Soldiers on this or similar topic! It is reported that she remarked in the darkness of bus No. 39 to a friend who had accompanied her, "What should they expect? I was giving my services. They should have appreciated the kind intention of my lecture." And so they should have, but youth is not always so keen on appreciation as their more thoughtful elders may happen to be.

When it rained again on Monday until late in the afternoon and the sun came out warm and strong about supper-time, all the boys were anxious to escape from the depressing atmosphere of the wards, to let loose the pent up emotions of two depressing days.

It just happened that the Woodbine had advertised an "All American Vaudeville." The soldiers

decided that it was only right and befitting such an event, that as many as possible of the residents of the hospital at Mildmay should attend on this opening night. Several enterprising spirits made a canvass of the wards and enlisted the interest of all who were at all able to attend. Permission for an extended leave for the evening was obtained from the Medical and Surgical Heads for those lads who wished to go.

A few of the enlisted personnel who were not on duty Monday night joined the party. Some two hundred tickets were booked for the orchestra stalls. A few Nurses and Officers secured several of the boxes. The management had borrowed some American flags to drape the front of boxes and balconies. Over the proscenium-arch entwined the American, English, and French colors, and long streamers of the other allied nations swept from this medallion to various points of the surrounding walls.

The boys, who were able, marched the half-a-dozen blocks. Those unable to walk that distance were conveyed in the army trucks. The Red Cross man had done his share and had seen that each lad was given a generous bag of lollipops,—gum-drops and a few large Italian chocolate creams. As the night was warm, these became mushy and sticky, a disagreeable, soft mass in the pockets of the boys.

When they arrived in military formation at the

entrance, they were greeted by a score of English girls, who pinned boutonnieres of red and white carnations and a blue bachelor's-button on the left breasts of the uniforms.

They filed in to the tune of "Yankee-Doodle," played by the orchestra. The assembled audience arose and cheered wildly. The boys reciprocated the compliment with three lusty cheers for Great Britain. Finally they seated themselves in the reserved stalls and the orchestra began the overture.

The program was mediocre in the extreme and a grave disappointment to the lads. Their chief enjoyment was in guying the disconcerted performers and boldly flirting with the prettier ones of the fairer sex—both those on the stage and those seated in the audience.

When the sixth act was reached, the endurance of the boys was exhausted. They were ready for deviltry at the slightest excuse. They did not have long to wait.

It was a so-termed "Sidewalk Conversationalist Act" between two comedians,—one attired as Uncle Sam, the other in the black face of minstrelsy. They began perpetrating jokes which seemed to reflect upon the dignity of America. Every joke made the comedian attired as Uncle Sam the butt. The jokes were harmless enough, although in exceeding bad taste. But to a military audience, already exhausted

by a poor, over-advertised, misrepresented program, it was beyond endurance.

As one man they began pelting the unhappy performers with the missiles so thoughtfully provided by the well-meaning Red Cross man. The chocolates were the most desirable of all pellets for this purpose, for they hit with a luscious splash that sounded vastly amusing to those who aimed well and landed a chocolate on the countenance of one or the other of the surprised, astonished comedians. They tried to make a wild dash for the exits, but the well-laid barrage prevented their escape. They were pelted as with a rain of bullets. The manager attempted to protest, but he beat a hasty retreat when he discovered the force and effectiveness of the gum-drop and chocolate barrage.

Finally, one of the more daring yelled, "Over the top, boys, and the best of luck!"

Instantly the two hundred,—the lame, the halt, the blind,—arose as one man, and, pushing and hobbling, over the footlights they flowed like an on-rushing flood-tide. One luckless individual lost his footing and with a thud fell through the top of the kettle-drum! The entire audience had arisen and were shrieking, screaming, utterings "boos" and shouts of disapproval, or openly sympathizing and applauding. A few waved American flags.

The comedians stood not on the order of their

going, but retreated hastily through the refuge of the public-house painted on the backdrop, leaving a great rent in its painted canvas. The Doughboys by the score plunged after them, pursuing along the corridors leading to dressing-rooms, where all was in a hubbub and a roar. Frightened actresses were struggling into their street clothing; a few had hastily donned raincoats and were cautiously making their way down the fire-escapes to the street.

The frantic manager had sent a hurry call for the police and a cordon of them was already forming about the theater.

The comedians who were the cause of the riot had made their escape. No one ever knew how or where. They never again appeared at the Woodbine and the expressman, who called for their trunks the next morning, did not leave an address.

Finally, the soldiers returned to their places and quietly sat down ready to enjoy the balance of the performance,—poor as it was. And be it said to their credit, they loudly and warmly applauded all the ensuing acts, to show that their malice was only toward those who were insulters of their Native Land.

At length the show was ended, and, to the tune of "There Is Only One England", the boys filed out in an orderly manner.

But in the street they were confronted by a formi-

dable mob of youthful denizens of the neighborhood, who were armed with sticks and stones and similar missiles. An Officer attempted a speech of explanation, but was quickly silenced by the yells and catcalls of the hoodlums.

When the soldiers attempted to pursue their way toward Mildmay, there were shouts of disapproval and a few stones fell with well-aimed effect. One of them knocked senseless a wounded lad.

Several women in the crowd cried, "For shame on ye, hurtin' a wounded Sammy!" Others laughed aloud. In a trice a battle royal was launched, in which men and women alike joined in close combat.

The hapless Doughboy found himself surrounded by several frantic, irate females who began to pummel him. Out from the ranks of those struggling on the sidelines, came a blond and buxom Amazon as his champion. She swept down upon the infuriated women, and with one upper-left sidewalked one of the combatants. The other woman turned upon her quick as a flash with a hat-pin in her hand, and made a vicious jab toward the eye of the Amazon. The Doughboy, seeing the move, anticipated her, caught her wrist, and held it tightly just as she had raised it for the thrust. He twisted her arm at the shoulder until she winced and cried out in pain.

He released her then and turned to move away.

But the woman on the curb had caught her breath and now arose to her feet. With feline swiftness she leaped upon him from behind and bore him to the stone flagging. His champion pounced upon her quickly. In a trice she had pulled her hair down and, clutching it tightly, was kicking the woman viciously. He arose and protested against this wanton violence. The girl released her victim.

"There, Cassie Fitzhall," she cried, "I fancy you've had your snoot full for this night!"

Poor Cassie arose and drew herself up with the air of injured dignity. She snatched her damaged hat from an urchin in the crowd, slapping him as she did so, for she had to vent the remnants of her wrath on someone. Grasping her torn skirts with her other hand and muttering an imprecation against no one in particular, she walked off with as majestic a stride as her condition would permit. She was surrounded by sympathizing neighbors who bore her away with them.

The other woman had slunk away and was lost in the thronging mass of interested humanity.

The Amazon clung close to the man she had singled out to defend, and steered him safely through the congestion, toward the fringe of the mob. There she paused and hesitated; then, mustering her courage, which seemed to have strangely vanished now

that the excitement of the moment had passed, she said,—

"I'd kind o' like to see you as far as the hospital; some of them females may attack you again."

He grinned and made answer that he "guessed they wouldn't do anything further, but if she wished, why he'd sure feel honored."

And so, she took his arm firmly, and, head held high, she walked at his side, with all the joy of possession filling her triumphant soul.

For awhile neither found words to speak. A few urchins trailed them, but the Amazon turned on them with a sort of threatening snarl, so that they desisted in their pursuit and turned toward other groups who were making their way with more or less difficulty toward the same goal—the hospital at Mildmay Park.

When they reached the lamp-post at the corner, the couple stopped.

"You're safe now, I rather fancy," she said. He grinned. "I won't go no further."

"How can I thank you?" he began.

"Don't," she answered abruptly. "I had a man once of me own"—Her voice faltered. "He done his bit and died along with millions o' others 'over there.'"

He stood awkward in the presence of the real

grief swelling from the soul of this heroine of the London slums. She choked with sobs which she made valiant effort to suppress.

He finally put his arm about her and drew her to him. She gave herself over to the comfort of the moment, let her shapely head rest on his shoulder, and cried wildly. He drew her into the shadows away from the light which was attracting too many questioning eyes in their direction. They sat down on the low brick wall of Mildmay Park, clinging to each other as drowning people might do. He felt grateful to this woman who had helped him; she felt grateful for the privilege of having helped him. It seemed as if she were paying a part of the debt which the English women and children felt toward America for coming into the War to rescue them from the Fate that befell poor Belgium and her helpless women and children.

They sat together on the low wall for a considerable time. He knew that he should be going, for it was nearly midnight, but he felt it hard to leave this sobbing woman, who clung to him as one who might in some way help her to bear the burden of sorrow and care which rested upon her.

Finally he explained the situation and began gently to unloosen himself from her warm embrace. They both had failed to notice the drizzle which had re-

sumed, and which was rapidly making them quite moist. She wore no hat and her fair hair was glistening with the drops of moisture.

He arose; she still sat silently on the edge of the wall.

He paused in indecision. Then he said,—

“Can you get home all right?”

“Rather,” she answered. “Didn’t I show you I could fight?”

“Yes,” he said with a smile of grim satisfaction as he recalled the broil of the earlier evening. “Well, I must not stay any longer. I’m late as it is.”

He had gone but a step, when she raised pleading hands toward him.

He stopped and scratched his head in perplexity. “What was it she wanted?”

As he stood there, he began to feel for his purse. “Perhaps she needed money, poor creature.” He drew forth his purse. She saw the movement and shook her head.

“I don’t want that sort o’ a reward,” she said bluntly.

“Is there anything I can do?” he inquired then.

She raised her head rather pathetically and said, “You might kiss me once, afore you go?”

That request took him by surprise. Strangely that idea had not entered his mind during the long

period that they had sat on the low wall. He had felt toward her a deference and a respect and something had made him feel that she would resent any such advance. And, too, he knew the strength of those arms, and had refrained.

He looked at her and smiled. The smile finished captivating her already won heart and she half rose toward him. He placed his great arms about her and planted on her upturned rosy lips, the biggest, most boyish, wholesome kiss that he had ever bestowed upon woman. It was a sincere kiss filled with gratitude and respect for this woman, so different from most women of her walk in life. He felt honored that she had asked him to kiss her.

She sighed deeply, satisfied, contented, as it were. Then she smacked her lips in appreciation.

"I'll go home and sleep happy tonight," she commented. "Gawd knows what you've done for me!"

She shook his hand awkwardly, and, turning on her heel, vanished into the dark, pulling her old woolen shawl over her head as she went.

He stood looking after her retreating form. She did not turn again. Then he suddenly remembered the hour and hobbled across the street to the iron gateway leading into the hospital grounds.

The old Porter frowned as he entered and glanced at the clock, the hands of which were just meeting

at the hour of midnight. He was about to reprove the lad for coming in after all the other patients, but one look at the glorified radiance which seemed to be streaming from his face, and he refrained, for he felt that somehow this lad had had a great vision.

IX

"co-co"

ALTHOUGH the season was rapidly advancing and the nights were now keenly crisp with light frosts and steam was acceptable in the chilly wards, yet there were many mild days with a considerable amount of warm sunshine. The boys from the hospital began going across the way to Mildmay Park with greater frequency. When it was summer, the boys went to the Park evenings and to the theater daytimes. Now they reversed the order, going first to the Park.

The leaves of the trees were beginning to turn, but belated roses still struggled to burst into smiles on the sunny south walls of the old gardens. Chrysanthemums were blooming profusely and dahlias were still in their glory. The war-gardens were mostly cabbages and beets now. The early vegetables had all been harvested by the owners of the tiny allotments in one corner of the park.

Just above the allotments, grammar-school boys of the upper farms, and some convalescent Tommies, were always playing soccer. They wore golf-stock-

ings, short running breeches of white linen, and the most gorgeous blazers of wool woven with contrasting stripes of startling color combination. This type of foot-ball was quite new to the Sammies, and they loved to loll in the grass and watch the competitors running about and kicking the ball. They were always arguing the respective merits of Association and Rugby Football. There were times when these arguments were so heated that blows seemed imminent. But they never got so far as that. These lads had lolled about hospitals so long that they had become "soft" and loathed physical effort. They were resorting constantly to all sorts of schemes to escape assignment to light duty about the wards, and some of these were not too creditable.

So it was that on one of the brightest of these November days, there came limping into the Park a Doughboy. He was all spruced up today and his appearance of extreme cleanliness was a joy to behold. His trousers had been pressed that morning with the ever-reliable brick; he had had his hair trimmed by the British barber at the hospital; his face shaved and massaged; and he had himself manicured his nails with extreme care. No, he was not expecting to meet any one in particular,—but he was always meeting some lady, and he wished to live up to the reputation of Beau Brummel which he had acquired about that portion of London which he

most frequented. He was known by that name to all the girls and lads of the neighborhood and he rather gloried in it.

Life on a ranch had not given him a chance to preen and groom; now that he had nothing else to do, he was making the most of his short hour, like some beautiful moth doomed so soon to perish. He had a silken handkerchief in his upper pocket, and he carried a brand new cane with a silver band on which was engraven his monogram. He also had the final touch in a pair of yellow chamois gloves! He wafted a strong odor of eau de cologne with a heavy basis of musk, as he passed.

There was still another reason for his glorious attire today and the extravagant way in which he had spent his money on the little luxuries enumerated. He was going back to the good old U. S. A., and, Oh, boy! when he caught a glimpse of that glorious lady, the Goddess of Liberty, in the Upper Bay! Well, wild horses could never again drag him from his Native Land!

He hoped this afternoon to meet a stunning creature who would match his own magnificence, and with whom he might loiter, walk, dine, and feel himself the cynosure of all eyes. He was keenly alert to the fascinations of each lounging female as he strolled the length of the benches beneath the old oaks that spread their arms in a sort of benediction.

He walked on up past that line of admiring glances, toward the soccer field, for he knew that Beauty loitered there on the grass to watch the knights of the ball, much as the historically famous ladies used to throng the lists to watch their knights at tourney.

In a very central—a very conspicuous spot—shaded somewhat by a rose-tree with a few fading blossoms, she sat! A silken Chinese parasol shaded her from any possible rays which the bush did not turn from her. She was a glorious vision, robed in the softest of pink muslin, a bewitching hat of pink ribbons with chiffon bows beneath her swanlike neck, crowned the most wonderful blue-black hair. A wealth of curls fell about the shapely shoulders and glistened in the sunlight as she moved her head about. Her great black eyes were alive with sparkling interest in the game—or the players. A tiny foot, clad in silken hose and satin slipper with a rosette of pearls, was thrust from beneath the billows of her frock. Several rings sparkled on her shapely fingers.

There was the lady he had come out to seek to crown with perfection his last day in London! He headed straight for her. She did not seem to notice his approach, but slyly she was observing him from the protection of her extremely thick, long, black lashes. She kept her eyes centered on the

toe of her tiny slipper—to all intents and purposes studying its shapeliness and grace. She kept moving her toe back and forth, and toyed with the smallest bit of lace that ever passed by the name of handkerchief.

He approached! Her breast rose and fell with excitement. "Would he stop? Yes, he had already stopped! He was standing just above her parasol!" She could see him through its sheeriness, but he could not see her—only the tiny foot and slender ankle. She grew nervous and undulated her foot more and more. She pulled recklessly at the bit of lace she held. He made no sign. Finally she could stand it no longer and she peeked about the edge of her quaint parasol and greeted him with an exquisitely alluring, questioning-sort of smile.

Instinctively he doffed his newly purchased overseas cap. She touched the grass beside her with her hand. Its jewels scintillated in the sun. She smiled at him and shrugged her shoulders, tilting her head to one side, ever so slightly. He recognized it as an invitation to seat himself at her side.

"If you have no objection,"—he said by way of opening the conversation, and sat down in the grass beside her.

"It is rather informal, isn't it?" she cooed at him.

"A trifle," he answered.

"But these are wartimes, and you are a soldier—

a wounded soldier—and we must do all we can to make them happy, musn't we?" she gurgled.

"We must," he answered.

Plainly she was a flirt. She looked at him with an expression of amusement playing about her cherry-red lips. She was persuaded that he was not a city man. His hands gave him away—they were square and uncompromising, and, although well-cared for, the fingers were not as slender and flexible as those of a man who did lighter work. But he was wholesome and so boyish, so strong, so adorably gotten up, and his untractable lock of wavy brown hair over one eye was so "cute"! She decided that she should like this lad. So she smiled again and leaned back on the grass with a luxurious sigh. He discovered then that she had a silken cushion with her on which to recline. She was adorable! He sighed in satisfaction—seeming to purr like a cat that is well-pleased with its treatment.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he ventured, for there seemed a strange reminiscence about her.

"Perhaps," she smiled back.

"Was it at Eagle Hut?"

She shook her head and the curls glistened again.

"Perhaps you have been to Mildmay?"

"Yes," she said. "I used to go there every day between two and four to see the patients."

"Oh, yes, now I begin to remember," he began. Then he stopped short.

"Yes?" she queried.

"Didn't you come with a girl called Peggy?"

"Yes, once or twice. But what do you know of Peggy? I don't go with her no more."

"Just as well," he answered, for he had strong recollections of Peggy and his missing watch.

Now he began to look more closely at the jewelry with which this girl was bedecked. He thought that he could recognize some of the rings and bracelet as having belonged to some of the Buddies who had declined to tell him what became of certain articles of adornment they had formerly worn. Yes, the bracelet he was sure he knew. It was one which a certain Buddy had worn on his upper arm. He had worn it at the wrist until the boys had made life too uncomfortable for him by their comments and constant joshing concerning it. A girl back home had locked it on the lad's arm when he left and he had vowed to come back to her to have it removed. There were many such bracelets, but this one had a locket in place of one of the links, and in that locket was a tiny photograph of the lady herself who had given the bracelet. He must find out!

"You have a pretty bracelet there," he commented.

The girl, whose eyes had followed his and who was expecting such a remark, smiled. "Do you like it?"

"Rather," he answered. "May I see it closer?"

She raised her lily-white arm and let it rest across his knee. He thrilled at the contact. The arm rippled deliciously from the wrist to the shoulder. That thrilled him still more, and so she repeated it.

Tenderly he touched the bracelet and turned it around, beginning to inspect the locket.

"Oh," she said. "You may open it. There is a picture there of one of my dearest friends." What a fib! But she thought that he would not know.

He opened it and there, yes, there was the identical portrait of that girl back home! How came she by this bracelet? Had Peggy taken it from the owner and given it to her, or was she a fence who received and disposed of stolen property? Now he glanced toward her breast where a watch was riding easily as her breast rose and fell. Expecting to see his own missing watch, he thrilled with anticipation, but sighed in disappointment when he saw that it wasn't his. Well, this was a charming girl; perhaps the Buddy had been tempted and had given her that bracelet. He did not know and it was none of his concern. It should not interfere with his enjoyment of the occasion.

So he lolled on the grass full length and she shared her pillow with him. He toyed with her beautiful arms, let his fingers run through her silken hair, and

twisted the curls about them. She laughed, smiled, showed the pearliest of pearly teeth, toyed with his necktie, and smoothed his wavy hair; they laughed as happily and as innocently as babes at play on the hearthrug. He tried on her rings, she tried on the one he had made from an identification-tag disk, and they laughed at the difference in the size of their hands!

They had quite forgotten the soccer game in progress just in front of them, until one of the players, by accident or design, kicked the ball out of bounds. It landed with a thud on his chest. He looked up with a start; she laughed. Then he sat up and threw the ball forcefully back at the players. They waved a "Thanks" at him and resumed the game.

"What is your name," he asked her.

"Co-Co," she said.

"Co-Co?"

"Yes."

"What a curious name!"

"I am a Belgian refugee," she explained.

"You speak good English."

"My Mother was English," she said simply.

"Oh," he said.

Then they went on billing and cooing. The sun sank lower in the heavens and tinged them with its golden glory. It was growing colder, but they toyed

and played quite unnoticing the very perceptible chill of evening with its fragrant, dewy odor. The soccer players had put on sweaters and were about to leave.

"Why don't you come to Mildmay any more?" he asked.

She blushed, frowned, and finally blurted out fiercely,—

"The stupid Officer in charge of the Receiving Ward won't let me!"

"No?"

"No," she snapped. "The last time I went there, he wouldn't let me go down to any of the wards, and then I sent an Orderly down with some notes, and the Orderly brought me back some money that the boys owed me for certain little services rendered—! The mean, contemptible old thing followed me to the gate and ordered the Porter not to let me in again—nor Peggy, either!"

"I see," he said, musingly.

Still this revelation, which awakened a memory of stories he had heard wafted about the hospital in whispers, did not interfere altogether with his pleasure. She was attractive, well-gowned, and that was what he had come to seek.

Just then he heard a whistle from nearby and, looking around he recognized one of his Buddies

from the hospital, who was anxiously striving to attract his attention. He frowned, excused himself to Co-Co, and stiffly arose to his feet. She passed him his cane.

"I fancy it is rather cool to stay any longer," she said. "The atmosphere grows chilly."

"I'll be right back, and then we'll have a bit to eat at Riccordi's, shall we?"

"With pleasure!" she trilled, and brushed the wrinkles from her gown.

He hobbled across toward the Buddy, an annoyed frown upon his broad brow.

"What do you want?" he said gruffly.

"Say, do you know who you are carrying on with?" the lad demanded.

"Yes, Co-Co," he answered.

"And don't you know who Co-Co is?"

"No. Only a pretty stunning girl, I say."

"Oh, yes, that's part of her stock in trade."

"Well, what of it?"

"And you've been kissing her, too!"

"Yes. I'm not ashamed to be seen kissing a pretty girl. Are you?"

"Well, sometimes—I should be if it were Co-Co."

"Why Co-Co? Come ahead, what do you know about her?"

"They don't let her into the hospital no more."

"I know all that."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, then, perhaps you know the rest of her reputation, too?"

"No worse than the rest of them around here, is it?"

"Well, no not in some ways, perhaps. All these girls are like that, and one can't really blame them,—it is wartimes, you know, and their fathers and brothers and sweethearts gone, and they are lonely, and all that, and so, if they want some fun with what fellers they can get—well, I don't blame them for that, do you?"

"What has that to do with Co-Co, then?" he persisted.

"Oh, nothing especially. Perhaps, though, you don't know that she is the most daring thief in all London?" he paused for the broad statement to sink in, and continued, "That took the wind out of your sails, didn't it, eh?"

"How do you know?"

"Ask any of the fellers. They'll tell you the same."

"I don't care," he said firmly, almost fiercely. "I'm going to dinner with her anyway!"

"You are?" he cried in astonishment.

"Sure thing! She's treated me decent, and how do I know what provocation she'd had that made her steal?"

"Well, I'll be——"

"No you won't either," he broke in sharply. "You'll mind your own business and trot right along back to the hospital. I know a lady when I see one, and me and she's going to have the very best dinner that Riccordi will sell us,—with all the fixings, too! This is my last night in London, and I'm going to make the most of it, with a swell dame at my side, too! Ta-ta!"

The Doughboy turned on his heel and hobbled back to Co-Co.

"Sit tight on your pocket-book," the departing Buddy yelled after him.

The warning evidently reached the ears of Co-Co, for she shivered, drew herself more sternly erect, and pulled more nervously at the silken fringe of the cushion with which she was fussing.

As the Doughboy approached her, she raised her exquisitely arched eyebrows and said,—

"I suppose he was telling you something about me?"

"No," he answered, and lied like the natural-born gentleman that he was, "He wanted to borrow some money."

"Oh," she said and sighed in relief. And then,—
"Did you lend it to him?"

"No, indeed! I need all the money I've got for the best dinner we can buy tonight, and after that

me and you's going to a swell show down at the Oxford! Are you on?"

Her bright eyes glistened suspiciously. She laid her hand tenderly on his arm. Then she kissed him. Something of feminine intuition told her that he did know her history, her bad, black reputation, and that despite all that he was going to keep his word and give her a good time. She appreciated his chivalry; her heart throbbed with a tenderness that had never been there before. She resolved to show him that she, too, could be a lady when occasion warranted. Together they rambled out through the iron gateway for the last time, across the square to Riccordi's and the promised banquet.

X

"GOOD-BYE-EE"

HIS last night had been one long, glorious, never-to-be-forgotten revel; Co-Co had proved herself the type of young lady that his heart had wished to help him celebrate his farewell to London. He had crept into his bed scandalously late,—had had to come over the wall, too! But the "best of luck" had been with him, for the Sister in charge of the ward had winked at his final indiscretion and had checked him in when he was still hours away from such return.

When he awoke, it was to the loud noise of the phonograph, shouting in derisive, stentorian tones,—

"Some day I'm going to murder the bugler,

Some day they're going to find him dead!"

He grinned, rubbed his sleepy eyes, and felt his somewhat aching head. Everyone was moving. His Buddy came over and jumped on his bed, rolled him about, and the two, in close embrace, rolled to the floor with a thud, amid yells and cries of the other occupants of the ward. The Sister only smiled. The boys were going away today, and, although they had

plagued the life out of her and had caused endless cares and worries, yet she felt a pang of regret to see them go, and kept wondering how they would convalesce and if all would reach home safely.

She bustled about, busy with temperatures, making final entries on charts and in books. She assisted a boy here with his blanket-roll, another with the pillow-case in which he was carrying his precious "souvenirs," or stopped to help some other wounded lad dress. Sometimes she gave a friendly pat to a pale, wan cheek, and spoke a soft word of encouragement; once or twice she paused beside some poor sick lad too ill to be moved, and whispered something tender to him, as the great tears welled in his eyes and rolled down his thin cheeks. His cup was bitter with disappointment; he felt discouraged at the long period of waiting yet ahead of him.

Breakfast arrived, and the boys filed up for the last time to get their "chow." Some were too intent upon cramming their pillow-case barracks-bags to heed the call of the inner-man and would have departed hungry, had not the Sister insisted that there was abundance of time to eat and pack too.

The last moments were those of hubbub and there were wild rushings about when the Sergeant in charge arrived and ordered all to march to the Receiving Ward.

Up they went, carrying their bursting pillow-

cases; their rolls of blankets thrown over their shoulders; in their hands many had extra packages, and even handbags! They filed into the already overflowing room and sat on the long wooden benches, like so many prisoners ready for the weary march across Siberian Steppes to their prisonhouse. Here there were no signs of the joy and exuberance that had been overflowing in the wards. They were quiet, serious, waiting in the cold, grey dawn.

When the Ambulance Column arrived and the ambulances and taxis one by one drove up to the door, the Major called their names and noticed that they were properly ticketed with a field card in a green envelope. They hastily passed out the door to the platform where a Sergeant checked them into the ambulances and autos. Another Sergeant below dispatched the cars, again checking on them. It was all done with a surprising swiftness and a certainty born of long experience in handling men. There were no hitches, no delays. The ambulances rolled out at the gates at regular intervals and sped swiftly along the comparatively deserted streets of Mildmay Park.

Here and there an early worker waved a hand and cried "Good-bye-ee," and the boys, now regaining their enthusiasm, called back.

As they drew closer to town where the people on the streets were more numerous, they began wav-

ing at them, and crying "Good-bye-ee." Flirtations were open, and as boldly answered by the pedestrians.

War and the uniform made for a solidarity unknown in peace times and civilian dress. There was a free and unaffected comradeship which one who has not worn the uniform can never experience,—a delightful sensation, which makes one regret that the donning of more variegated clothing causes one to lose the sense of brotherhood and companionship which he has known in the Army. The little old suit that lays packed away in the trunk, in the bottom of the wardrobe, will always bring back memories of those dear, precious, bye-gone days, when one was so reckless of consequences, and so entirely happy.

Although our boy from the West was able to be about London, by some curious error his name had gotten in the list of stretcher-cases. At the last moment it was found impracticable to change the score of sheets of the steamer sailing lists, and so it happened that he was compelled to travel on a litter!

At the suggestion of the night Sergeant, he had concealed his clothing in the barracks-bag, beneath his pillow. He was going away in Red Cross pajamas and a glorious dark blue lounging-robe of fine, smooth cloth with a quilted collar and a cord

of scarlet silk. On his head rested his new over-seas cap at its jauntiest angle; in his hand was a small American flag, a parting gift to each of the boys from the Red Cross man.

As the ambulance rolled out of the gates, he stood in the end waving his flag and calling "Good-bye-ee" to the assembled Officers, Nurses, Personnel, patients, and the few curious children of the neighborhood. He waved and flirted until the Sister in the ambulance decided that he was over-taxing himself and compelled him to climb into his stretcher and lie down. He protested against this, but she was firm. Not knowing the true condition of affairs, she believed him a stretcher-case and chided him for so abusing his fractured femur!

From this reclining position he could see little, so he turned his attention upon the Sister riding there beside him. She was rather attractive, though older than most of the girls he had amused himself with in London. But there was something very alluring. Her blue uniform was quite becoming. Her hands were white and shapely, their touch most tender. And so, he complained of a "headache."

Immediately she reached into her capacious bag, found a linen cloth, moistened it with camphor and laid it to his aching brow. She began to say soft, pleasant, soothing things, and he reached out his

hand, took hold of her soft one, and clasped it to his heart. Becoming braver, he pressed it fervently to his lips. She, poor woman, believing that the lad was ill, allowed him to hold her hand and made no protest, although the red blood suffused her face, and she glanced around to see if the other three occupants were noticing the incident. Fortunately they were too engrossed in an effort to get a final glimpse of London—for most of them their first view, as they had arrived in the darkness of night in an ambulance and were whirling away on a stretcher without ever having left the ward of the hospital.

"Sister," he said, "the neck of my collar is too tight. Would you mind unbuttoning it?"

She did. There was another period of silence. Then he complained,

"I think my pillow needs to be shaken up, it is too low."

She shook it up. He sighed and sank back upon it.

"I believe I am too warm," he announced a few seconds later. Instantly she drew forth her fan and began fanning him. He drew deep breaths and sighed happily.

She thought that he had fallen asleep and desisted her efforts of fanning. Then he announced that he was about to faint.

She searched a moment in the depths of that ca-

pacious bag, which seemed to hold everything imaginable, and found her lavender smelling-salts. She thrust them beneath his nose and he drank in their sharp fragrance eagerly. But finally he drew too deep a breath, made a horrible grimace, and sneezed. The Sister removed them solicitously and offered him a clean, folded handkerchief, which he gratefully accepted.

Next he discovered that his precious cane—the one with the silver band and his monogram—was missing! The Sister made a frantic search in the ambulance; in the end he himself discovered that it was lying all the time beside him, where he had placed it when he first entered. She sat down again, relieved, and hoped that his wants were satisfied.

But no, he realized that he was thirsty. The faithful woman opened her thermos-bottle and gave him a cool, refreshing drink of distilled water. He thanked her and managed to again grasp her hand and hold it a fleeting moment as she went to take the empty cup.

Again she seated herself. Suddenly the patient leaped from his stretcher and rushed to the end of the ambulance to wave at a group of ammunition-workers he had just spied as they rolled toward the bridge that leads to Waterloo Station. The Sister grabbed his robe just in time to prevent him

from falling out of the rear of the ambulance.

"You are incorrigible!" she said reprovingly, and considerably vexed.

He grinned and said, "Beaucoup?"

"I never had a patient who demanded so much attention," she declared.

"I'll bet you never had!" he cried.

"You should be ashamed of yourself."

"I am not," he laughed. "You know you don't mind. You have enjoyed waiting on me."

"Really?" she said, with a questioning uplift of shapely brows.

"I'll tell the world! They all do. All women are alike. They like to lavish attention on a wounded soldier. 'Fess up, now, don't they?"

"We enter nursing to relieve pain," she said weakly.

"Certainly!" he cried gleefully. "But you like to fuss around a feller just the same. It gives you a heart-thrill just as much as them girls out there like to be fussed a bit." And he waved again at the ammunition-workers in their neat trousers and puttees, who, walking rapidly, were keeping up with the snail-like movement of the ambulances threading their way through the congestion of traffic at the station approach.

The Sister blushed in confusion. "How dare he compare her with those women!" Then she had a

sharp twinge of conscience, for she realized that they were doing their bit—and a large one, too!—for England, just as much as she was doing hers—only in a different way.

The ambulance had come under the great glass roof and was stopping. She insisted that he must lie down on his stretcher. And so, with a merry laugh, he climbed into his "lower berth," as he called it, and awaited the moment when the litter-bearers should take him from the ambulance to the train.

It came at last. The Sister gave his pillow a final adjustment, pulled the blankets higher and tucked them in more firmly. As she bent above him, he reached up his arms, and, before she could struggle or protest, he had clasped her tightly and was raining a perfect volley of explosive kisses upon her face. He did not care where they landed, so long as they reached their destination.

She was all confusion, and the two stretcher-bearers climbing in at the end, laughed loudly. Fortunately the other patients had been removed, so they were not there to add to the Sister's embarrassment. But one of the bearers said,—

"Hard to say 'Good-bye' to your sweetheart, ain't it, Sister?"

This made it worse. She would have protested, but the Doughboy held her tight, and answered for her—

"You bet it is! Me and Sister is going to be married after the War; ain't we, Sister?"

He gave her a last big hug and was carried away, waving his flag at her as he vanished, and yelling,—

"Good-bye-ee!"

She was compelled to cry "Good luck!" to save her vanity.

Then she sank into the dark end of the ambulance, hastily smoothed out her hair, and re-set her hat. The ambulance-driver called through the tiny window above her head,—

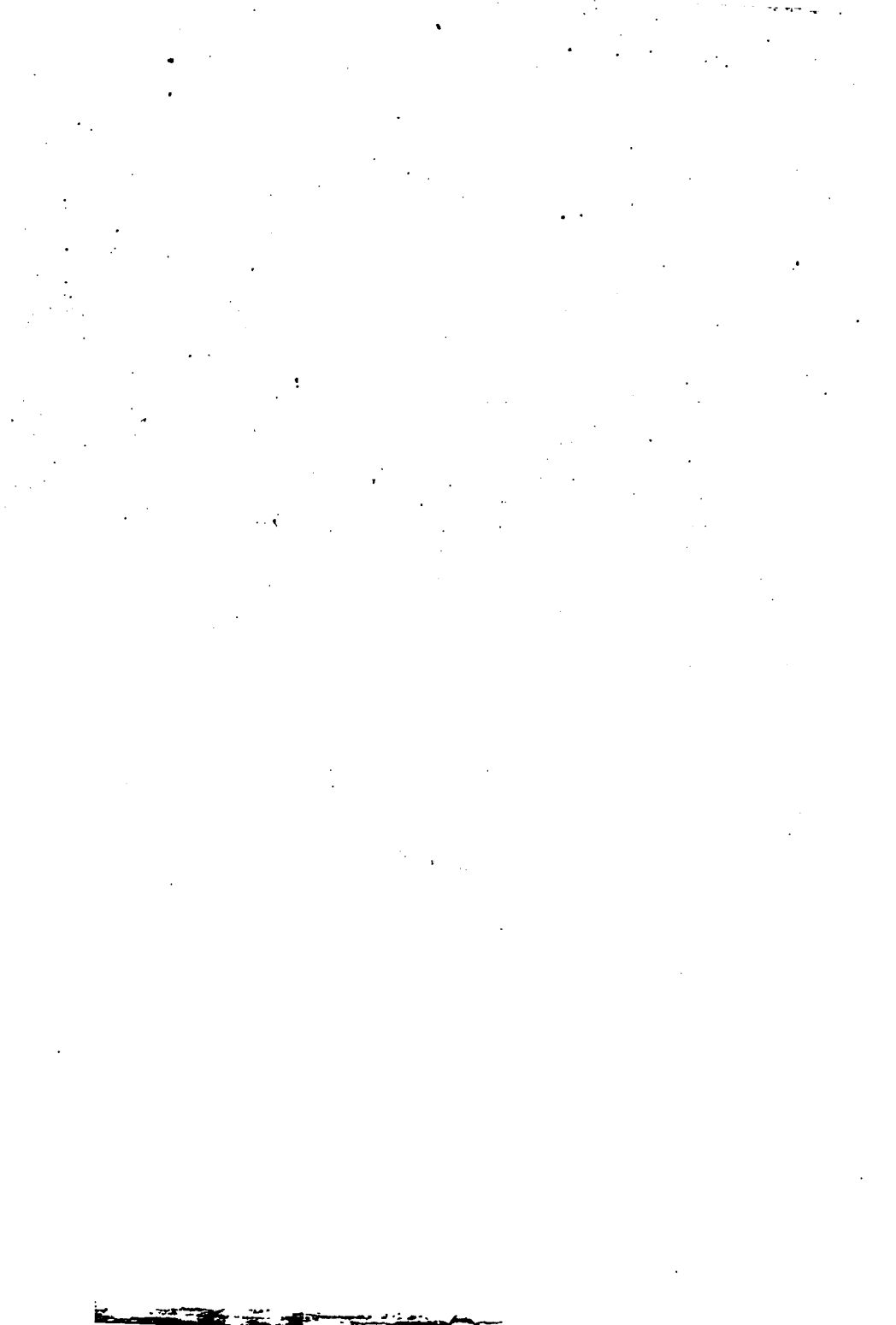
"Better come out here, Mary. The air is crisp and bracing this morning. It will do you good to get some of it. You are looking peaked lately. I'll stop for you when we get clear of the traffic."

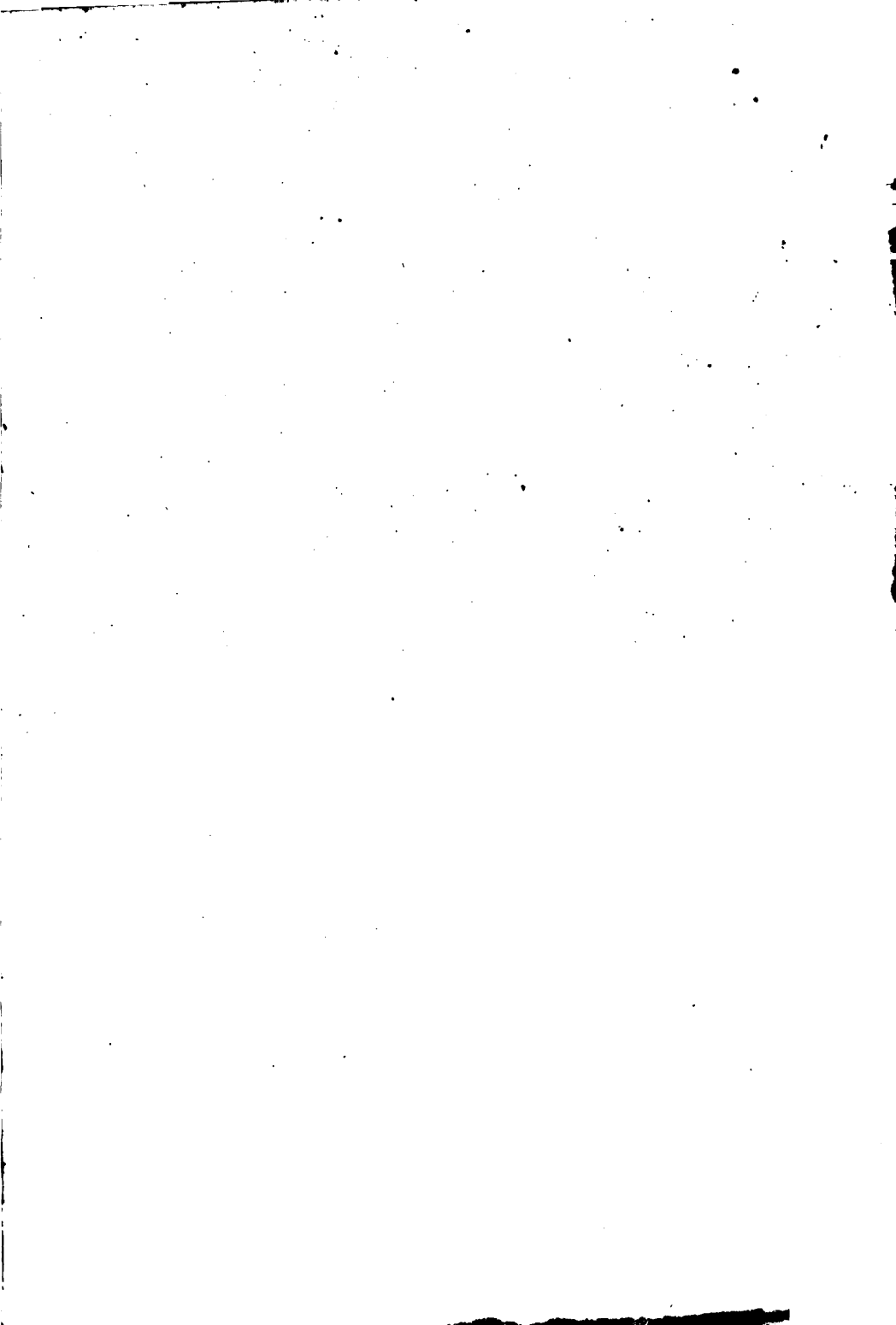
And about six blocks down he did, and Mary climbed into the seat beside her husband. She did not mention the embarrassing moments which she had had during that long drive from Mildmay Park to Waterloo Station!

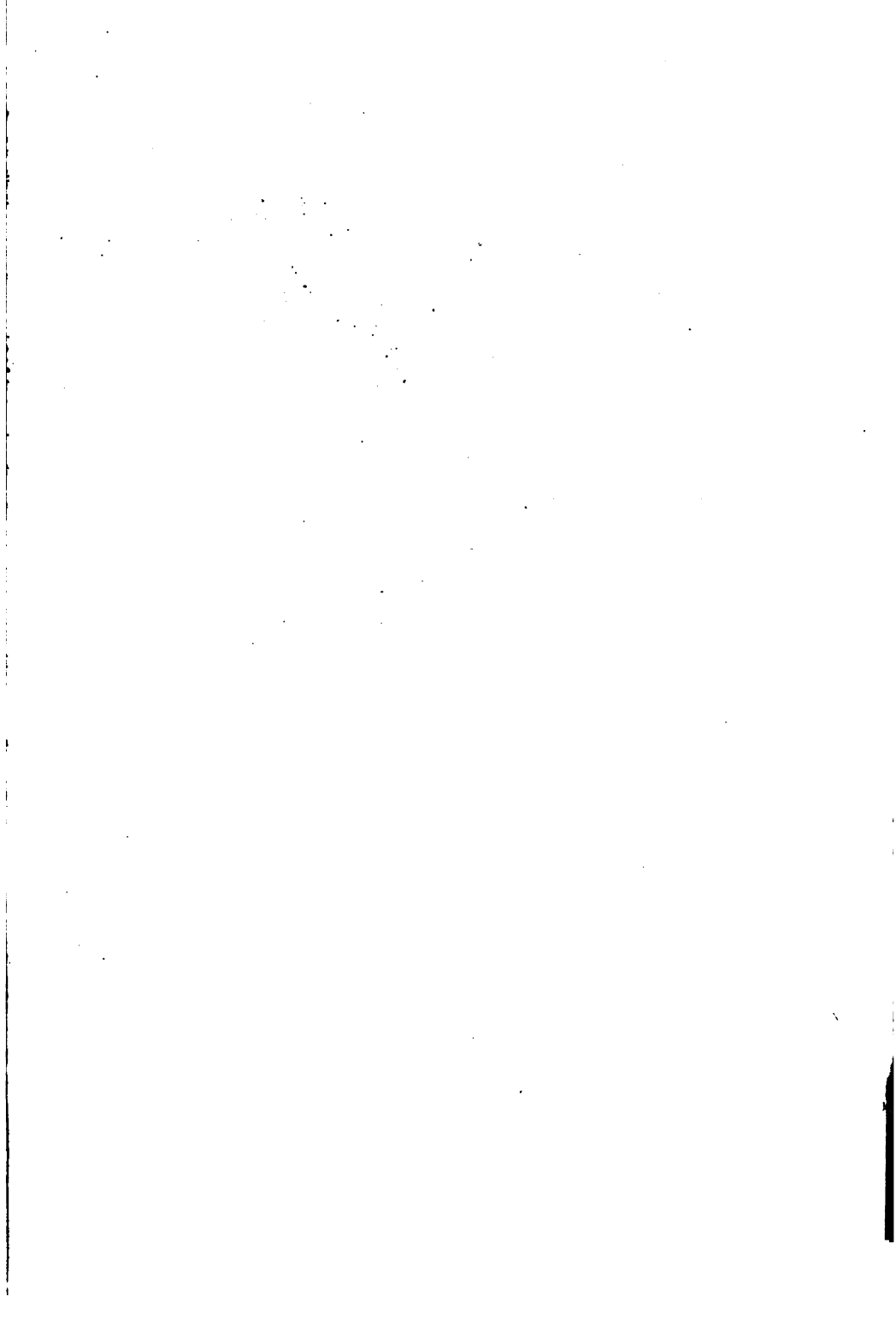
On the train there was no one with whom to flirt. He could see very little of the scenery. So the Doughboy amused himself by taking out the photograph of the little girl "back in God's Country" to gaze at it. Surreptitiously he kissed her happy, innocently smiling face. He found some of her letters in the pocket of his pajamas, and read them over

carefully, smiling in happy anticipation of the hour when they should meet again, and she should consent to change her name to his.

The many girls that he had met in France and those with whom he had had a gay time during the weeks of convalescence in London, were all of the Past, their memory already blotted out. He could think now of but two women whom he longed to see,—the one, a cold, formidable lady of rather large stature who guards the Upper Bay of New York's superb harbor; the other, a blue-eyed, fair-haired girl of twenty with a smile like the sunshine, who awaited him away off there on the fertile slopes of Washington!







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